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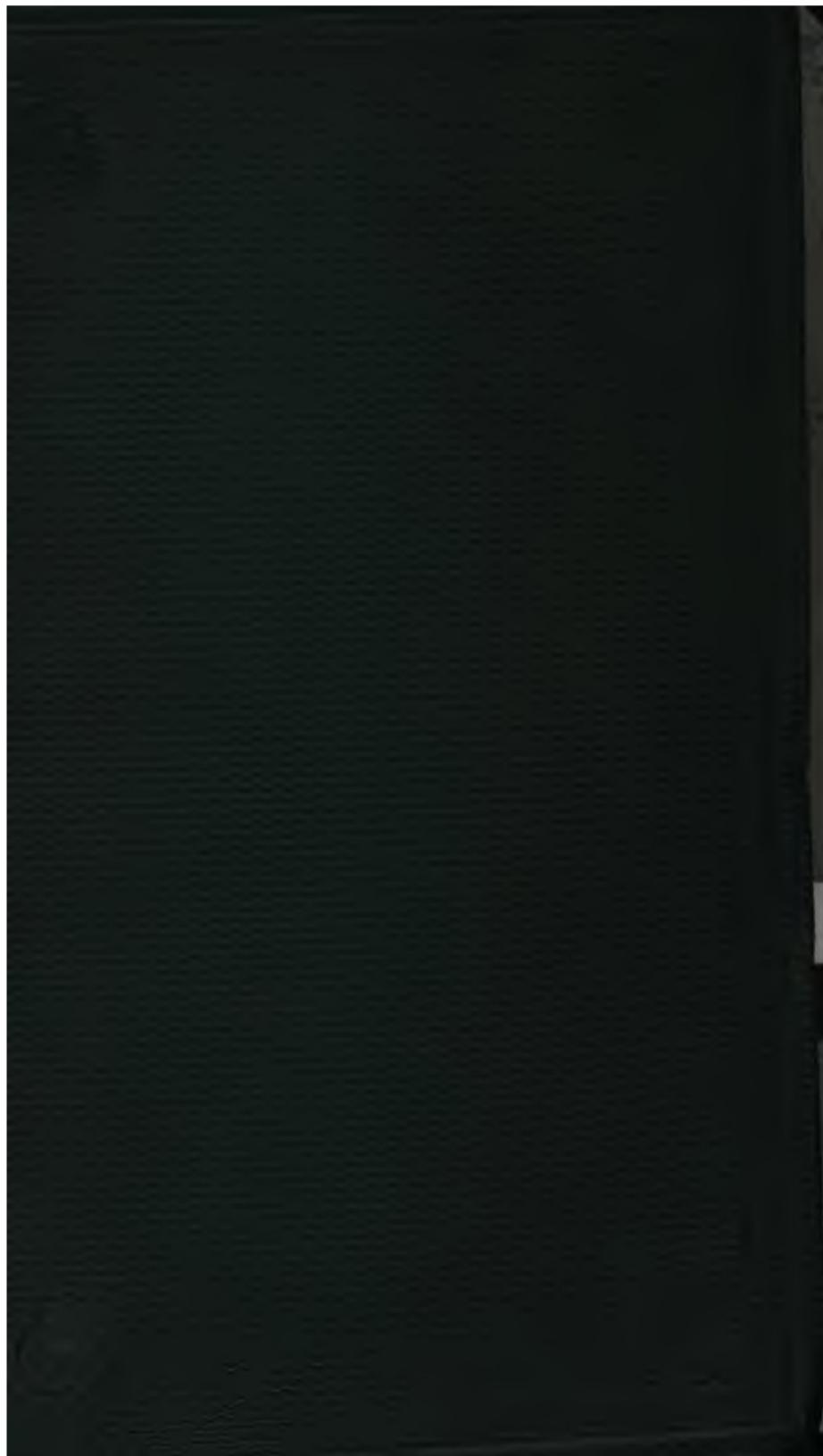
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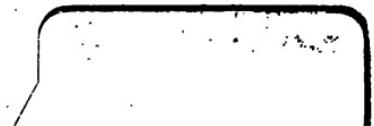
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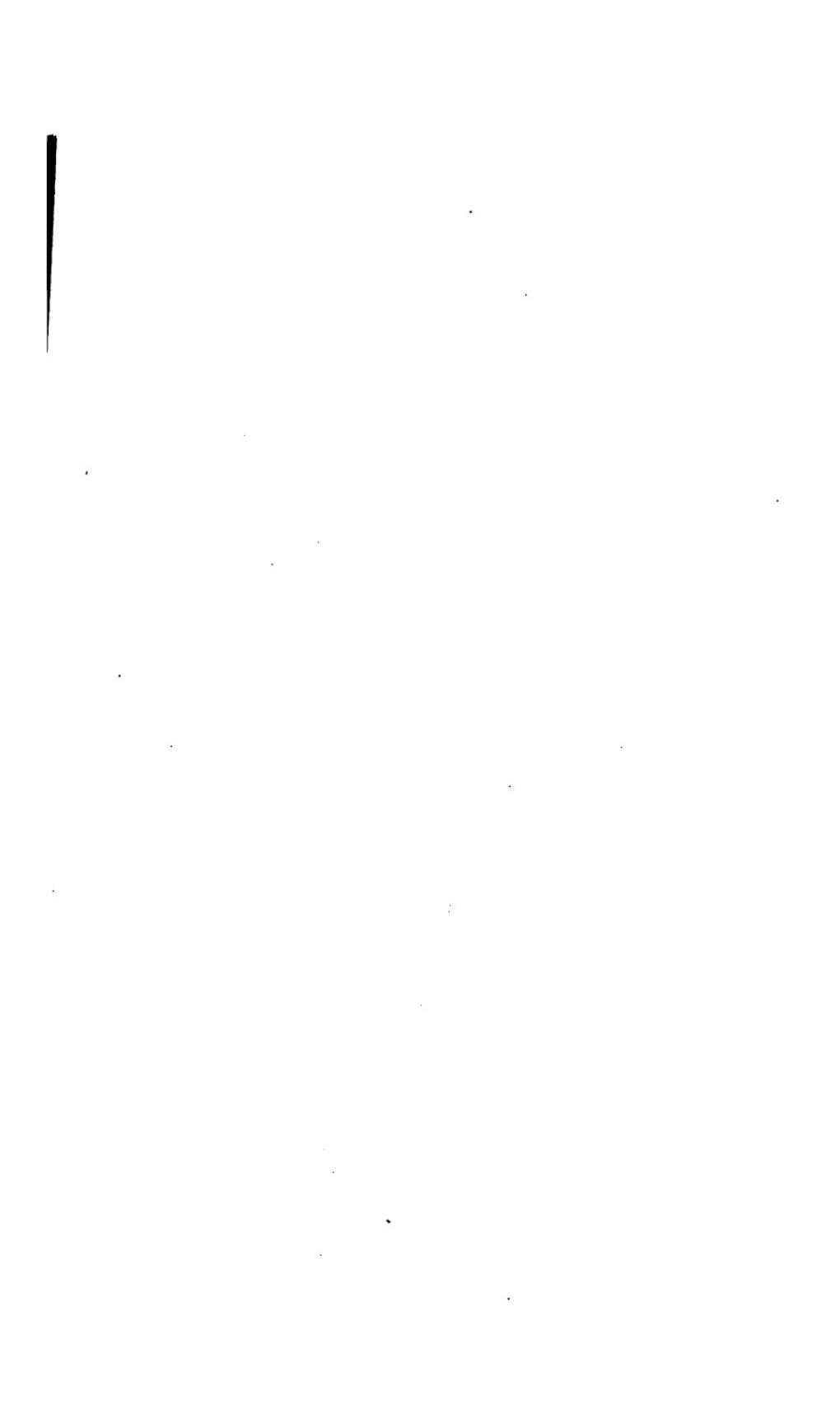




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THE  
PROVIDENCE OF GOD,  
VIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF  
HOLY SCRIPTURE.

BY  
THOMAS JACKSON.

"JUST are the ways of God,  
And justifiable to men ;  
Unless there be who think not God at all.  
If any be, they walk obscure ;  
For of such doctrine never was there school,  
But the heart of the fool,  
And no man therein doctor but himself."

MILTON.

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## PREFACE.

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THE providence of God is one of the most prominent subjects of Holy Scripture, pervading almost every page of the sacred volume ; and the manner in which it is there treated renders it a powerful restraint upon sin, an incentive to piety and virtue, and a source of encouragement to good men. Yet many years have passed away since a practical treatise on this subject, adapted to general use as a family book, has been published in England. Of late years, indeed, several elaborate works have appeared, in which it is discussed as a question of natural theology, their argumentation being based upon philosophy rather than the written word of God.

The most remarkable work on this great subject, that has yet appeared in the English language, is the "Apology or Declaration of the Power and Providence of God in the Government of the World." By George Hakewill, D.D., Archdeacon of Surrey." It is an ample folio volume, which was published in the early part of the seventeenth century, and passed through various editions during the author's lifetime. Its object is to disprove the opinion, which was then extensively prevalent, that all created nature is in a state of decay ; so that the heavenly bodies are less brilliant, the earth less fruitful, vegetation less lux-

uriant, brute creatures less powerful, and mankind less vigorous both in body and mind, than they were in the early ages of the world. In the support of his views the learned author has accumulated a surprising mass of information, gathered from every quarter, both ancient and modern, and has displayed an amount of accurate reading which excites wonder in this age of restless activity, when the theological scholar is almost daily forced out of his study, to take part in the management of public charities, and in the stir of active life. Hakewill's days and nights must have been mostly spent in literary research. Like Elihu, he "fetched his knowledge from afar."

Towards the close of the same century four good and useful works on the providence of God issued from the English press,—the productions of Flavel, T[omas] C[rane], Charnock, and Sherlock. Flavel's volume, which is tender and devout, and abounds with anecdote, has been often reprinted. That of Thomas Crane is entitled, "A Prospect of Providence." It is homely as a literary composition, minute in its details, and pious in its tendency. An extract from it was inserted by Mr. Wesley in his "Christian Library," a compilation containing what he regarded as "the choicest pieces of practical divinity in the English tongue." Crane was associated with Mr. Richard Alleine, as a fellow-labourer in the Gospel, and was one of the ejected ministers. Charnock's "Discourse on Divine Providence" is a posthumous publication, but well sustains the high theological character of the author, who died comparatively

young. Dr. Sherlock's "Discourse" on the same subject is more argumentative and less practical than the other three. It was intended to be an antidote to the scepticism and infidelity which had then infected the higher ranks of society in England. Since these volumes appeared, many sermons and essays on Divine providence have been published, exhibiting various degrees of merit and usefulness.

In the volume now before the reader the author has aimed at a simple display of the teaching of Holy Scripture on this momentous question. The sacred writers often speak of God's "testimony;" and in this light it is apprehended the entire Bible is to be regarded. It is God's "testimony" as to His being and perfections, the creation of the universe, the angelic world, His providential care and government, the ruin of mankind by sin, their redemption by the death of His incarnate Son, the nature and method of salvation, the duty of mankind in all the relations of life, and a future state of rewards and punishments. His "testimonies" on these and other subjects are recommended to the belief and practical attention of mankind by such evidence as is every way sufficient and decisive,—the evidence, especially, of prophecy and of miracles; and if men refuse to believe what their Maker has "testified" and authenticated, they must answer for their incredulity before His judgment-seat, where the secret workings of every heart will be brought to light, and the causes of infidelity, as well as of every other evil, will be fully detected. "Revelation was written for our instruction; and are we too wise

to be instructed by God Himself? Throw we by unread, and as of no consequence, an unsealed letter sent to us from the Almighty?"\*

The writer has endeavoured, in the composition of this work, to combine brevity with comprehensiveness; but how far he has succeeded must be left to the decision of parties less interested than himself. The examples illustrative and confirmatory of his several positions, it will be observed, are deduced from the Scriptures; but on no subject does he profess to have cited all the examples that the sacred volume contains. This would have swelled his book to an inconvenient size, and have limited its circulation and usefulness; and he is anxious to assist, as far as possible, in counteracting that forgetfulness of God which is a disease of fallen human nature, and which so large an amount of modern literature is adapted to promote. His desire is, as much as in him lies, to lead people to think of Him who is about our bed, and about our path, and who spieth out all our ways. Happy they who see His hand in every object of nature, and in every event of life; and who study in all things to please Him in the strength of their Saviour's grace! Some of the Scripture facts, it will be observed, are referred to oftener than once; but as they are intended to illustrate different views of Divine Providence, it is hoped they will not be regarded as needless repetitions.

LONDON,  
*February 22d, 1862.*

\* Dr. Young.

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THE  
PROVIDENCE OF GOD.

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CHAPTER I.

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD VIEWED IN CONNEXION  
WITH THE CREATION.

By the providence of God, generally speaking, is meant His care for every object of nature; so that His power is uninterruptedly exercised in upholding, controlling, and directing every person and every thing, rendering all subservient to His glory, and the accomplishment of His wise, holy, gracious, merciful, and righteous purposes. As He is everywhere present in all the perfection of His nature, nothing escapes the observation of His eye, and nothing takes place but by His agency, His appointment, or His permission; for every creature is at His absolute disposal. Inorganic matter is sustained in being by His power; the earth and the heavenly bodies perform their revolutions under His direction; in vegetable nature His hand is in constant operation; by His bounty the wants of the entire animal creation are daily supplied; and mankind, created in His image, endued with understanding, and therefore under His moral government, are the objects

of His special regard, having the greatest share in His paternal love. It is in their behalf that He has made the most signal manifestations of His attributes and character.

Rightly to apprehend the providence of God, we must view it in its connexion with the act of creation, with the fall of man, with the redemption of the world by the death of Christ, and with a future state of rewards and punishments. When viewed apart from these subjects, the doctrine of Divine providence is involved in difficulties which no ingenuity can unravel; and the more deeply it is studied, the more dark and perplexing those difficulties become. But of the creation, the fall, redemption, and a future state, the Holy Scriptures are the only authentic record. To their teaching, therefore, as the undoubted word of God, we surrender ourselves through the ensuing pages.

That all things were created by an infinitely wise, benevolent, and almighty Being, is a truth suggested by enlightened reason, and for ever set at rest by Scripture testimony. Thoughtful men among the ancient heathen speculated on this vital question, and erred greatly in their opinions concerning it.\* Some of them imagined that the admirable constitution of the universe was the result of chance; others, that it was necessary and eternal; others, again, that it bore undeniable marks of wisdom and benevolence, and must therefore have been made, but they failed to discover the unity of its Maker: a subject on which the testimony of Holy Scripture is explicit and unequivocal. The simplest student of the Bible, therefore, in respect of this first

\* See note A, in the Appendix.

principle of true religion, is immensely in advance of the greatest men of heathen antiquity; who either acknowledged no God at all, or a multiplicity of deities of limited power and presence, capricious in the bestowal of their favours, and some of whom were regarded as the patrons of the most odious vices, and even of the foulest crimes. According to the testimony of Scripture, the entire universe stands related to God as His creation, the offspring of His power; and He, the Maker of all worlds, is not only almighty, eternal, every where present, and acquainted with all things, but is also infinitely wise, holy, just, and good,—characters of which are impressed upon all His works.

No act of God is asserted with greater frequency and clearness by the inspired writers than the act of creation. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” (Gen. i. 1.)\* “In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is.” (Exod. xx. 11.) “The living God.....made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein.” (Acts xiv. 15.) These texts are only a specimen of the current language of the sacred writers on this great question.

In what manner the process of the creation was accomplished we profess not either to explain or understand. It does not indeed appear that the human

\* “I read that ‘in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth:’ by which I understand, that, at some remote period,—which may or may not baffle human arithmetic,—it was the pleasure of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost,—three Persons, co-eternal and co-equal, one God,—out of nothing to create the entire universe.”—Burgon’s “Inspiration and Interpretation,” pp. 24, 25. Edition of 1861.

mind, at least in its present imperfect state, is capable of apprehending the exact mode of the connexion between the act of the Almighty's will, and the existence of all created nature. We regard the creation as a revealed fact, announced to us by "God that cannot lie." "Through faith" in His testimony "we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that *things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*" (Heb. xi. 3.) Some of the wiser heathens, it would seem, thought that the matter of the universe was eternal; and hence they ascribed to their gods nothing more than the fabrication of different objects out of pre-existing materials. Whereas the Scriptures ascribe to God the act of creation in the full and unrestricted meaning of that term. He gave existence to that which previously had no being.

Stupendous as the work of the creation appears to us, especially considering the magnitude of the universe, and the endless variety of objects which it comprehends, it is sometimes spoken of in Holy Scripture as scarcely a *work* at all, but as produced by a simple volition of the Almighty. "God said, Let there be light: and there was light;" (Gen. i. 3;) and so of every other part of the creation. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth." "He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." (Psalm xxxiii. 6, 9.)

Modern science asserts that the earth existed and was inhabited through vast periods of duration before the time mentioned by Moses for the creation of man and of the other classes of animals which he has described. This statement the sacred narrative neither affirms nor

denies. It teaches, however, that whatever now exists, or may have formerly existed, received its being from God. He only has existed from eternity; and all other beings, whatever may be their nature, are the creatures of His power. "Since the fossil Flora, and the various races of animated creatures which geologists have classified with so much industry and skill, confessedly belong to a period of immemorial antiquity; and, with very rare exceptions indeed, represent extinct species; I, as an interpreter of Scripture, am not at all concerned with them. Moses asserts nothing at all about them one way or the other. What Revelation says is, that nearly six thousand years ago, after a mighty catastrophe,—unexplained alike in its cause, its nature, and its duration,—the Creator of the universe instituted upon the surface of this earth of ours that order of things which has continued ever since, and which is observed at this instant to prevail; that He was pleased to parcel out His transcendent operations, and to spread them over six days; and that He ceased from the work of creation on the seventh day. All extant species, whether of the vegetable or the animal kingdom, including man himself, belong to the week in question."\*

The connexion between creation and providence is direct and obvious. No being is independent but God Himself. Every creature is as absolutely dependent upon its Creator, for the continuance of its existence, as it was for the commencement of its existence; and but for His sustaining power, it must immediately return to its original nothingness. He "upholdeth all

\* Burgon's "Inspiration and Interpretation," pp. xciii., xciv.  
Edition of 1861.

things by the word of His power;" (Heb. i. 3;) "by Him all things consist;" (Col. i. 17;) "and for His pleasure all things are and were created." (Rev. iv. 11.) In respect of dependence upon God, there is no difference between one creature and another. The highest order of angels are on a level with the feeblest insects. All alike subsist by the will of Him that made them. No being is independent but the great First Cause.

Should it be alleged, that many objects in nature are too mean and insignificant to engage the attention and care of the infinite and eternal God: the answer is, that He made them; He made them what they are; and if the creation of them was not unworthy of His greatness, neither is it unworthy of Him to extend to them His guardian care. Nor must we measure His counsels and acts by our apprehension of what is great and little. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." (Isai. lv. 8, 9.)

From the act of creation arises God's absolute right of dominion over all nature. As the Maker of heaven and earth, and of all that they contain, they belong to Him; and His right to dispose of them at His pleasure is indisputable. He is the "Possessor of heaven and earth." (Gen. xiv. 19, 22.) "All that is in the heaven and in the earth is" His. (1 Chron. xxix. 11.) "The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, saith the Lord of hosts." (Haggai ii. 8.) "Every beast in the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." (Psalm l. 10.) "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof;

the world, and they that dwell therein." (Psalm xxiv. 1.) "Behold, all souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine." (Ezek. xviii. 3.) He therefore "doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" (Dan. iv. 35.)

The manner in which He exercises His right of dominion is every way worthy of Himself. His government is not a tyranny, but a reign of benevolence and of righteousness. Having endued mankind with understanding and moral freedom, He holds them responsible for their actions; but His "law," under which they are placed, "is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good;" (Rom. vii. 12;) and His "statutes are right, rejoicing the heart." (Psalm xix. 8.) His government, therefore, both providential and moral, is declared to be a ground of universal joy and gladness. "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof." (Psalm xcvi. 1.) His will, if we may so speak, is always regulated by the moral attributes of His nature. As He "cannot lie," so He cannot do anything that is unworthy of His wisdom, His justice, His mercy, His holiness, His goodness. When His purposes are fully disclosed and accomplished, all His works and ways will therefore be celebrated, with unmixed admiration and delight, by angels and sanctified men for ever. "He is a Rock, His work is perfect: all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He." (Deut. xxxii. 4.)

From God's proprietorship of all nature the most

important consequences arise. He claims the right to dispose of His own creation according to "the good pleasure of His will." "The earth hath He given to the children of men," (Psalm cxv. 16,) and He has subjected the brute creatures to their use and benefit. (Gen. ix. 2, 3.) He dispossessed the seven nations of Canaan of the territory which they occupied, and directed their extermination on account of their enormous wickedness; and He gave their land to the tribes of Israel, who were themselves at length disinherited, as the punishment of their sin in rejecting Christ and His salvation: for they also held the land by a specified tenure from God, as the sovereign Lord of all. To them it would have been an "everlasting possession," had they lived in obedience to His will, but not otherwise. He therefore said to them, "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is Mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with Me." (Lev. xxv. 23.) Strictly speaking, they were not proprietors, but tenants at will; and the current language of the Old Testament is, that it was God's land in which they dwelt. (Deut. xxxii. 43; 2 Chron. vii. 20; Psalm lxxxv. 1; Joel ii. 18; iii. 2.)

It pleased God, not only to give the tribes of Israel the land of Canaan, but the land in a state of cultivation, with its appropriate wells and dwelling-houses; prepared for their use by the care and labour of the original inhabitants. "When the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which He sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, and houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not,

and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and art full; then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." (Deut. vi. 10-12.) Benefits similar to those which are here enumerated are conferred by the providence of God upon the successive generations of men, in a state of civilization, in every country. Generally speaking, the peasants occupy cottages which other hands have built; the rich dwell in mansions which their fathers erected; husbandmen cultivate the soil which former labourers cleared of forest-trees, enclosed, and otherwise prepared for their use; scientific men enjoy the benefit of discoveries earlier than their own; merchants and navigators prosecute schemes of commerce for which previous adventurers prepared the way; literary men avail themselves of the labours of scholars who lived, studied, and wrote, ages before they themselves were born; and all classes of people, in civilized communities, enjoy important advantages derived from the legislation and military valour of other times. Thus, by the bounty of God's providence, mankind in their successive ages enjoy accumulated advantages of which their predecessors were destitute: yet are they apt to forget the Hand Divine from which all good is derived, as were the ungrateful Israelites of old.

As the great Creator had a right to transfer the land of Canaan from the possession of its original inhabitants to the tribes of Israel, so He had an equal right to transfer the property which was in the hands of the Egyptians into the hands of the same people, whom the

Egyptians had long and grievously oppressed. He accordingly said to the Hebrew tribes, before their departure from "the iron furnace," whence their cry had gone up to heaven, "Every woman shall borrow [ask] of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians." (Exod. iii. 22.) The direction was repeated on the eve of their departure. "And the Lord said unto Moses, I will bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether. Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow [ask] of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold." (Exod. xi. 1, 2.) It is added, "And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed [asked] of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent [gave] unto them. And they spoiled the Egyptians." (Exod. xii. 35, 36.) These transactions had been anticipated in the Divine purpose; for it was said to Abraham, upwards of four hundred years before, "That nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward they shall come out with great substance." (Gen. xv. 14.) In accordance with this prediction, we find that the tribes of Israel, after they had departed from the house of bondage, were possessed of great property, which they expended in the production of the golden calf, and upon the rich and costly ornaments of

the tabernacle in the wilderness. (Exod. xxv. 1-7; xxxii. 2-4.)

Exception has been taken as to the manner in which the people of Israel obtained the property of their Egyptian oppressors, upon whom, it has been alleged, a fraud was practised ; their gold, and silver, and raiment being “borrowed,” and never returned, nor even intended to be returned. On this subject there has been much idle declamation on the part of men hostile to the Holy Scriptures ; but their cavils admit of an easy answer, being founded upon a misapprehension of the sacred text, which simply states that the Israelites “asked,” and the Egyptians “gave.”

The Hebrew word, which in our authorized version is rendered to *borrow*, occurs in the Old Testament upwards of one hundred and sixty times in its various forms ; and ninety times it is by our translators rendered to *ask*. At other times they have rendered it to *desire*, to *inquire*, &c. ; and in six places, to *borrow*. No intimation is given in the sacred narrative that when the Hebrew men and women received of the Egyptians silver, gold, and raiment, they engaged to return these articles, or were expected to return them. The truth is, when the last plague was inflicted, so that there was “a great cry in Egypt, for there was not an house in which there was not one dead,” the people were anxious to get rid of the Hebrew tribes at any price ; “for they said, We be all dead men.” The Israelites were ready to depart without any remuneration for their labours and sufferings ; but God interposed in behalf of the oppressed. “And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses ; and they

borrowed [asked] of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent [gave] unto them such things as they required." (Exod. xii. 35, 36.)

Why the Hebrew word is rendered "borrowed" in these and in some few texts besides, it would be difficult to imagine. To render it by this term in nearly every other text where it occurs would be palpably absurd. What would be thought of such a rendering in the following texts, which are a mere specimen of those in which the word is used? "And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had *borrowed* [asked] this thing. And God said unto him, Because thou hast *borrowed* [asked] this thing, and hast not *borrowed* [asked] for thyself long life, neither hast *borrowed* [asked] riches for thyself, nor hast *borrowed* [asked] the life of thine enemies; but hast *borrowed* [asked] for thyself understanding to discern judgment; behold, I have done according to thy words." "I have given thee that which thou hast not *borrowed* [asked], both riches and honour." (1 Kings iii. 10-12, 13.) "One thing have I *borrowed* [asked] of the Lord, that will I seek after." (Psalm xxvii. 4.) "*Borrow* [pray, ask] for the peace of Jerusalem." (Psalm cxxii. 6.) Perhaps the Hebrew word in question may be used in Exod. xxii. 14, and in 2 Kings vi. 5, to express such an asking as implies a promise that the thing asked for shall be returned: but as the promise is not expressed in either case, and is not necessarily implied in the word, the term *asked*, it is humbly submitted, would, in both cases, be a more appropriate rendering than "borrowed."

Should it be alleged, in opposition to our interpretation of the text in question, that the Hebrews are said to have "spoiled the Egyptians," (Exod. xii. 36,) and that their conduct cannot therefore have been morally right; the answer is, that to spoil the spoiler is an act of righteous retribution. Egypt had enriched herself by the unrequited labour of the Hebrew tribes; and her children were now required to make a partial restitution, which they did under the mingled feelings of terror and favour, with which they were inspired by God, who is the Fountain of justice, and the Guardian of the oppressed. The tribes of Israel were doubtless entitled, on every principle of right, to a far greater amount of property than they carried away with them, considering the wasting labours to which they had been subjected, and the cruel sufferings which their oppressors had wantonly inflicted upon them. The murder of their children was an injury which no amount of money could compensate.

We have, then, in this case an example of the transfer of property from one party to another by the direct interposition of God, as the great Proprietor of all. It was the despotic government of Egypt mainly that oppressed the Hebrews with insufferable toil, and slew their children; and as the Egyptians in general had acquiesced in the oppression and cruelty of their rulers, it was right that they should contribute something in the way of compensation. It is no uncommon thing for property to be providentially transferred from one party to another under other circumstances. While we are writing, the people of England are subscribing large sums of money for the relief of famishing millions in

India. The hand of God is in this movement. He gives the ability to relieve this sad case of want ; He gives the command to relieve it ; and He gives the disposition. In doing all this He acts not merely as the compassionate Helper of the destitute, but as the Lord of all ; in effect saying, "The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine."

It may be further observed, that if the Almighty Creator is the great and sole Proprietor of all things, then the men who in their several degrees are possessed of this world's good are His stewards, and accountable to Him for all that they possess. "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." (1 Cor. iv. 2.) All the wealth that passes through the hands of men in this world must be accounted for to the Lord of all in the last great day ; and happy is the man to whom it will then be said, " Well done, good and faithful servant !" In the mean time, while wealth is conscientiously applied to the purposes of piety, benevolence, and charity, according to the will of God, those who have the happiness and honour of being the almoners of His bounty should execute their trust, not in a spirit of ostentation, like the Jewish Pharisees, but "with all lowliness of mind ;" of which we have a fine example in David, and the chiefs of the Hebrew nation, when they presented their costly offerings toward the erection of the temple. Thus the king, at the head of his people, poured forth the feelings of his heart : "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort ? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee. For we are strangers before Thee, and

sojourners, as were all our fathers : our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding. O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build Thee an house for Thine holy name cometh of Thine hand, and is all Thine own." (1 Chron. xxix. 14-16.)

Here the ability to contribute property for a pious object, and the disposition to contribute, are both confessed to be the gift of God ; for, while the gold and the silver are His, the tender heart, which yields to the impulse of devout and benevolent feeling, is also His gift. The persons of men, and all that they possess, belong to God, and when they surrender both to Him, they only give Him back His own. Acts of righteousness and charity are indeed rewardable ; but only because of God's gracious promise, not that of themselves they give men any claim upon His justice in the way of right.

From God's act of creation, we not only infer the fact of a universal Providence, but are compelled to acknowledge that miracles, strictly so called, are possible, and even probable, in a high degree.\* To deny the possibility of miracles is presumptuous, especially on the part of Theists, who acknowledge God as the Creator ; and, supposing them to be wrought, they are as capable of satisfactory proof, from human testimony, as are any other events of Divine providence. The creation of the heavens, and the earth, and of all that they contain, is the greatest of all miracles ; and He who performed it is assuredly able to introduce any changes that He may deem requisite in His own works. He has subjected the earth, the sea, the atmosphere, the animal tribes,

\* See Note B, in the Appendix.

vegetable nature, and even the heavenly bodies, to the use of mankind, so as to secure their physical well-being; and if by suspending the course of nature, in some special instances, He can authenticate any revelation of His will, and thus promote the spiritual and everlasting welfare of His human offspring, there is every reason for believing that such a suspension will take place. The stupendous miracles connected with the departure of the tribes of Israel out of Egypt were avowedly wrought to demonstrate the supremacy of God, in an age of general apostasy from Him, and that His name might be declared throughout all the earth, (Exod ix. 16,) to the confusion of idolatry; and certainly the Gospel miracles, intended to recommend to the practical belief of mankind the revelation of redeeming grace, are equally worthy of "the God of the spirits of all flesh." He who created the Red Sea was assuredly able to divide its waters, and to cause the stream of the Jordan to run backwards; and such an interposition of His power might be fairly expected when the end proposed was the glory of His own name, and the endless benefit of His favourite creature man. And "why should it be thought a thing incredible" that He, for the same most merciful and gracious purpose, "should raise the dead?" Is He not at liberty to do what He will in His own creation? Can any limits be assigned to His power? and is not His love infinite and everlasting? He is a bold and a rash man who will prescribe rules of action for the great Creator, beyond which HE shall not be allowed to pass. The evidence by which the miracles of Holy Scripture are recommended to our belief and practical attention may

be evaded and ignored, but it has never been disproved. It has carried conviction to the minds of millions, including many of the most profound thinkers that ever lived, and is such as to leave sceptics and cavillers without excuse. "I conclude," says Butler, "that there certainly is no such presumption against miracles, as to render them in any wise incredible: that, on the contrary, our being able to discern reasons for them gives a positive credibility to the history of them in cases where those reasons hold: and that it is by no means certain that there is any peculiar presumption at all, from analogy, even in the lowest degree, against miracles, as distinguished from other extraordinary phenomena." \*

"To common sense great nature's course proclaims  
 A DEITY. When mankind falls asleep,  
 A miracle is sent as an alarm  
 To wake the world, and prove Him o'er again,  
 By recent argument, but not more strong.  
 Say which imports more plenitude of power,  
 Or nature's laws to *fix*, or to *repeal*?  
 To *make* a sun, or *stop* his mid career?  
 To countermand his orders, and send back  
 The flaming courier to the frighted East,  
 Warm'd and astonish'd at his evening ray?  
 Or bid the moon, as with her journey tired,  
 In Ajalon's soft flowery vale repose?  
 Great things are these; still greater to create.  
 \*      \*      \*      \*      \*  
 Say'st thou, The course of Nature governs all?  
 The course of Nature is the art of God.

Who sees Him not  
 Nature's CONTROLLER, AUTHOR, GUIDE, and END?  
 Who turns his eye on Nature's midnight face,  
 But must inquire, What hand behind the scene,  
 What arm almighty, put these wheeling globes

\* Analogy, part ii., chapter ii.

In motion, and wound up the vast machine ?  
Who rounded in his palm these spacious orbes ?  
Who bowl'd them flaming through the dark profound,  
Num'rous as glittering gems of morning dew,  
Or sparks from populous cities in a blaze,  
And set the bosom of old Night on fire ?

\* \* \* \* \*

Who marshals this bright host ? enrolls their names ?  
Appoints their posts, their marches, and returns,  
Punctual at stated periods ? Who disbands  
These vet'ran troops, their final duty done,  
If e'er disbanded ? He

\* \* \* \* \*

Who call'd them out of Chaos to the field  
Where now they war with vice and unbelief." \*

There are cases in which it may be difficult to distinguish between a miracle, strictly so called, and an ordinary interposition of Divine providence ; but, generally speaking, the distinction is obvious, and is every-where acknowledged. A hand or a foot is diseased ; and we pray that God may render successful the means which are used for its recovery. Mortification ensues, the member is amputated, and we cease to pray for its recovery. A friend is afflicted, we pray for the renewal of his health ; he dies, and we discontinue our prayers in his behalf. Why is this ? Is not God as able to restore an amputated limb, as to heal a limb that is diseased ? Is He not as able to raise the dead, as to heal the sick ? Unquestionably He is. But He is pleased to reserve these extraordinary displays of His power for the confirmation of revealed truth. We have therefore no right to ask for them, or to expect them, for any other purpose, or upon any other occasion. Pope, whose mind was sadly perverted by intercourse with his infidel friend Bolingbroke, treats the doctrine

\* Young.

of a particular providence with ridicule ; and asks whether the law of gravitation will be suspended, supposing a good man to be passing by a hanging wall, so that it will not fall till he is out of the reach of danger : assuming that there can be no particular providence in the case unless a miracle be wrought. The answer is, There may be no miracle in the case, no suspension of the law of gravitation ; and yet there may be a direct and merciful interposition of the providence of God. The man may be induced by motives to us unknown, and coming from a quarter we may not suspect, to pass by the wall before the law of gravitation causes it to fall ; or he may be induced by the same means to defer his walk till the wall has actually fallen ; or he may prosecute his walk in another direction ; or it may please God that the wall shall fall upon him, and inflict upon him such an injury as may prevent a greater calamity, or be to him matter of salutary discipline, or even extinguish life, and thus end his sufferings for ever. In whatever manner it may please God to deal with good men, and whatever a miserable and shallow scepticism may suggest to the contrary, " He careth for them ;" and so minute is His care, that " even the very hairs of their head are all numbered." (1 Peter v. 7 ; Luke xii. 7.) It is no valid objection to the Scripture doctrine of a particular providence, to say that the best of men occasionally receive bodily injury, and are even slain, by what are called accidents and casualties, in common with the rest of mankind : for to them bodily injuries, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, are a means of improving their virtue ; and to them death is gain, in whatever form it may come.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD VIEWED IN CONNEXION WITH THE FALL AND THE REDEMPTION OF MANKIND.

In the Mosaic account of the creation of the heaven and the earth, with all that they contain, we observe a wise gradation, every object preparing the way for that which is to follow, and all rising in importance as they successively appear. Inorganic matter is first created; then the varieties of vegetable nature; then the brute creatures, designed to inhabit the earth, the air, and the sea; and then **MAN** appears as the crown of all, the tributary lord of this lower world. The earth, the sea, the light, the heavenly bodies, the atmosphere, trees, shrubs, flowers, were called into existence by the simple command of God; various classes of animals rose out of the earth, or out of the sea, but the creation of man is spoken of as matter of deliberate counsel; the two constituent parts of his nature are distinctly specified, with the separate origin of each. His body is formed out of the dust of the ground, moulded by the hand Divine; the soul comes more immediately from God, and is described as the breath of the Almighty. Dominion over the inferior creatures is represented as one direct object of his creation; and he is said to be made in “the image of God;” by which we understand not merely the right of dominion, but also an immaterial and immortal

nature, and especially “righteousness and true holiness.” (Eph. iv. 24.)

For the happiness of man, thus distinguished in his creation, every provision was made that wisdom and goodness could devise. The earth was prepared as his place of residence; the air, for him to breathe; the light, to discover the works of God by which he was surrounded; fruit-trees, to supply him with food; the heavenly bodies, to measure time for his advantage; the brute creatures, of every form and habit, in earth and air and sea, subjected to his use and will; his understanding clear as a lamp of light; his affections pure, and directed to holy objects; his conscience more than tranquil, being a faithful witness of God’s approval; his appointed home the garden of Eden, enclosed, planted, and adorned by the hand of God Himself. Between his mental faculties and his bodily appetites the most perfect harmony subsisted; and all his enjoyments were doubled by the presence and perfect sympathy of the “help meet for him,” the fair and beautiful companion, whom God had graciously provided to relieve his solitude. In this state he was free from evil; he knew neither sickness, pain, nor sorrow; every object around him ministered to his enjoyment; all his wants were bountifully supplied; and God was ever with him as the true source of happiness, and the one object of his confidence, delight, and love. Possessed of his Maker’s image, he was, of course, regarded by his Maker with perfect complacency. The Lord took pleasure in him; and, as in the case of the holy angels, he had the freest access to God, and the most intimate and joyous communion with Him. While all nature, above,

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around, beneath, reflected the glory of the great Creator, and everywhere told of His wisdom, goodness, and love, man beheld and recognised that glory, and in raptures of holy admiration and delight rendered to the Lord the glory due unto His name.

This state of blessedness was transient in its duration. It was held by a specified tenure, and was vilely cast away for a thing of nought.

Having invested His human offspring with understanding, and given them a nature which was perfectly righteous and holy, it pleased God to place them in subjection to His authority, requiring of them a spiritual worship, and an uninterrupted course of obedience to His law, which is “holy, and just, and good;” an expression of His essential purity and righteousness, directly adapted to promote their best and highest interests: for no real happiness can any intelligent creature enjoy in the absence of spiritual and moral rectitude.

In the exercise of His righteous sovereignty, it pleased God to try the obedience of our first parents by other means beside that of the moral law. He placed in the midst of the garden of Eden “the tree of knowledge of good and evil,” from the fruit of which He commanded them to abstain, on pain of death; allowing them, at the same time, free access to the fruit of every other tree in that sacred enclosure. He also subjected them to the further test of exposure to the wiles of Satan, the leader of the rebel host of fallen angels; who is denominated “the devil,” “a liar,” that “abode not in the truth,” “that old serpent,” and “a murderer from the beginning.” Without the permission of God,

that accursed spirit could have had no access to the innocent parents of the human family, occupying one of the fairest places in the creation. For an acquaintance with all the reasons of that permission we must wait till the plans and purposes of God shall be disclosed to us in a future state of being, when we shall be better qualified to apprehend them: only this we know, that exposure to the suggestions of Satan was not peculiar to the father and mother of our race. It was a part of the trial of the Son of God in His incarnate state; and is no less a part of the trial of good men in every age and place: a fact of which they have solemn warning in the Holy Scriptures.

That our first parents were faithless in the hour of trial we have sad proof, not only in the sacred records, but in our own experience, and in the history of all nations. "The woman was deceived," so as to transgress the Divine command; and the man was "persuaded" to follow her example. The consequence was the loss of God's favour, and subjection to the threatened penalty. They were driven out of the garden of Eden, denied all future access to the tree of life, sent out into the wide world to cultivate the soil as a means of subsistence, doomed to hard toil, pain, sorrow, and death. With the loss of God's favour, and the withdrawal of His Spirit, there followed by necessary consequence the loss of their original righteousness, and the corruption of their moral nature. They were brought under the power of "the carnal mind," which is "enmity against God," so that they shunned His presence in guilty shame and terror. In and of themselves, they became incapable of any acceptable act of

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worship, or of obedience to their Maker's will. The holy affection by which they had been bound to each other was extinguished; so that they laid the blame of their sin upon each other. In this state they were not only wretched and miserable, but also exposed to "the bitter pains of eternal death."

The consequences of their sin did not terminate in themselves, but extend to the whole of their posterity, to whom the sin of Adam is so imputed, that they endure its penalty in common with himself. He was the natural head and representative of the human race. In him they all sinned, and they suffer all the evils to which he was doomed when he stood before his offended Lawgiver a self-convicted culprit. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned;" or, as the marginal rendering is, "in whom," that is, in Adam, "all have sinned." "By one man's offence death reigned;" "by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation;" "by one man's disobedience, *οἱ πολλοί*, the many were made sinners." (Rom. v. 12, 17-19.) "In Adam all die." (1 Cor. xv. 22.) Such is the testimony of an inspired apostle, with which the history of mankind in all ages is in perfect agreement.

Many busy intellects have endeavoured to grapple with the question concerning the origin of evil. That evil, both moral and physical, should exist under the government of an infinitely good Being, has been deemed a great difficulty, for the solution of which many suggestions have been offered, as the result of anxious inquiry. But, after all the learned labour that has been

expended upon the question, nothing satisfactory has ever been advanced beyond the teaching of Holy Scripture. God made man upright, and placed him under a law, that he might render an intelligent and voluntary obedience to his Maker's will;—for all moral obedience is and must be intelligent and voluntary;—promising a reward in case of obedience, and threatening to inflict a penalty in case of transgression. Man violated the law, and incurred the penalty. Moral evil then, the evil of sin, is man's own act, wilfully and inexcusably committed; and physical evil, the evil of suffering, is the penalty inflicted by the righteous Lawgiver, whose authority has been practically disregarded. The inquiry, therefore, Why did God create beings capable of sin? is only another form of the question, Why did He create moral agents? The answer is, that such was His pleasure: and beyond this we have no right to speculate. At present we must submit to "know in part," and wait for fuller information till it shall please God to impart it in a future state.

Exception has often been taken to the doctrine of original sin, especially to that branch of it which is usually denominated imputed guilt. But it is useless to argue against obvious fact. As the punishment of his sin, Adam was denied all access to the original tree of life, the sacrament of God's first covenant with mankind; and not one of his children has been allowed to taste of its fruit. He was expelled from the garden of Eden, the original inheritance of mankind; and not one of his offspring has ever entered that hallowed spot. He was condemned to a life of labour and of sorrow; and this also is the common lot; so that "the

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whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain" from age to age. He was doomed to die; and this also is God's appointment with respect to Adam's descendants, little children not excepted.

Indeed, to this state of things the general arrangements of Divine providence are undeniably analogous. In all ages and places the conduct of mankind affects their posterity both for good and evil. To the people of Israel the Almighty said, "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments." (Exod. xx. 5, 6.) The family of Eli were disinherited of the high priesthood in perpetuity for the sins of that unfaithful man, and of his two profligate sons, whom he neglected to restrain. (1 Sam. ii. 30-36.) Saul, the king of Israel, forfeited his crown and his life by sin; and the regal honours were transferred to David and his family, who belonged to another tribe. (1 Sam. xv. 26-29.) Saul slew the Gibeonites, in violation of a solemn oath; and after his death seven of his sons were publicly executed as the punishment of that heinous crime. (2 Sam. xxi. 1-9.) The Jews who were contemporaries of Christ, for the crucifixion of Him, and the rejection of His Gospel, were driven from the land of their fathers; and their posterity have been exiles eighteen hundred years.

The fact, indeed, is undeniable, that the character and conduct of parents generally affect their children; and this providential arrangement operates as a restraint upon sin, and an incentive to virtue. However incom-

prehensible this part of the Divine economy may appear "when judged by a merely human standard, it is seen in daily exercise in the world, agreeably to the teaching of Scripture; so that in this, as in many other matters of difficulty, there is a complete accord between the Bible and experience."\* Of the righteous man it is said, that "his seed is blessed;" (Psalm xxxvii. 26;) and "a good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children." (Prov. xiii. 22.) Had the father of the human family yielded the required obedience to his Creator's will, that obedience would have been so imputed to his posterity, that they would have shared in the benefit consequent upon it. They would have been born with a pure nature, to the possession of the garden of Eden, with all its delights, and all the happiness that their father enjoyed. He failed to fulfil his trust; and his transgression entailed guilt and a curse upon his posterity, as well as upon himself. Such are the terrible effects of sin!†

But the character of God as a holy Lawgiver and a righteous Judge is not the only revelation of Himself that He has made in His word. He has also declared Himself to be the God of mercy and salvation, with whom "judgment" is "a strange work," and acts of grace and of tender compassion His delight. For the recovery of mankind from their lapsed condition He has made every requisite provision by the incarnation and sacrificial death of His eternal Son. This wonderful scheme was formed in the counsels of His wisdom and

\* Macdonald's "Introduction to the Pentateuch," vol. ii., p. 199.  
Edit. 1861.

† See Note C, in the Appendix.

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love, in the prospect of man's fall and ruin, before the foundations of the world were laid, and was in part revealed as soon as the mortal offence was completed, and in connexion with the announcement of the fearful penalty. "The Seed of the woman," it was declared, should "bruise" the serpent's "head," though His "heel" should be bruised in the conflict. The promise was thus expressed in enigmatical terms; but it was full of encouragement; and its meaning became more and more apparent as time advanced, and the period of its fulfilment drew near.

For the manifestation of Christ in the flesh, and the accomplishment of the world's redemption by Him, every preparation was made by the providence and grace of God. Animal sacrifices were instituted, as an impressive type of the sacrifice of the Cross; the forgiveness of sin was vouchsafed by God to guilty men, but only in connexion with that solemn rite; Abraham and his posterity were taken into covenant with God, with a special reference to the advent of the promised Seed; an elaborate symbolical form of worship was instituted by God Himself among His chosen people; inspired prophets were raised up from time to time, all of whom bore witness to the coming of the world's Redeemer, and gave such encouraging views of His person and character, and of the effects of His appearing, that He became "the Desire of all nations." Abraham saw His day in distant prospect, and was glad at the sight. Kings and prophets and righteous men longed for His manifestation, that they might see His glory, receive His instructions, behold His works of power and mercy, and share in the benefits of His reign. His way was

prepared by a messenger of such sanctity of character and dignity of office, that he was declared to be even "more than a prophet," and one of the greatest men that had ever been born. His preaching engaged the attention of the people in the length and breadth of the Holy Land, and drew the greater part of them into the wilderness of Judea to see and hear him.

After the lapse of four thousand years of promise, desire, and hope, the Redeemer and Saviour of the world appeared, not in secular pomp, but in "great humility." Yet in Him dwelt "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;" and His attendants "beheld His glory, the glory as of the only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." After a life of spotless purity and righteousness, and a ministry of unexampled simplicity, impressiveness, originality, and power, confirmed by a series of corresponding miracles, He voluntarily submitted to die as a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of the world. The blood which He shed is emphatically called "the precious blood of Christ." Its preciousness, and consequent atoning efficacy, arose from His perfect innocence, for He was "without blemish, and without spot;" and from the union of the Divine Nature with the human, so as to constitute one Person. By this wonderful transaction a demonstration was made of God's essential righteousness, the claims of which are met and satisfied; the honour of the Divine government is secured; sin is declared to be "exceeding sinful;" the curse of the law is inflicted; the mercy of God is seen in all its pitying tenderness; provision is made for the free justification of the guilty; all mankind are placed under a dispensation of grace; and

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the kingdom of heaven is opened to all believers. Well might the apostle of the Gentiles glory in the cross of Christ, and resolve to glory in nothing else; (Gal. vi. 14;) and well might the venerable and aged Simeon express an immediate willingness to die, when his eyes had seen and his arms embraced the Author of salvation, whom God had prepared before the face of all people. (Luke ii. 28-31.)

It is impossible for words to express, or for any finite mind to apprehend, the full grandeur of the great redeeming act of Christ when He appeared as a passive Sufferer upon the cross. The eternal Father provided the Victim; for Christ is "the Lamb of God," (John i. 29,) given by God in love to the world. (John iii. 16.) Though infinitely beloved, the Father "spared Him not," but "delivered Him up" to agonize and die. (Rom. viii. 32.) The Son, in compliance with His Father's will, and in love to our guilty race, voluntarily laid down His life. No man took it from Him, but He laid it down of Himself; for He had an absolute power to lay it down and to take it again. (John x. 18.) And the Holy Spirit was also concerned in the great scheme of redemption. He formed the human nature of Christ in the womb of His virgin mother; (Matt. i. 20;) He came upon our Lord at His baptism, (Matt. iii. 16,) and dwelt in Him "without measure;" (John iii. 34;) the Spirit concurred with Him in His ministry, (Luke iv. 18,) and in His miracles; (Matt. xii. 28;) and doubtless in all His official acts as the Christ of God, until He "offered Himself without spot to God," as an atoning sacrifice, that He might reconcile a guilty world to God. (Heb. ix. 14.)

O mystery of love, that He who is over all, God blessed for ever, (Rom. ix. 5,) should be “made a curse for us,” (Gal. iii. 13,) the Father and the Holy Spirit being parties in the mysterious transaction!

The redemption which has been effected by the Son of God is commensurate with the wants of the entire human race; for He “gave Himself a ransom for all,” and by the grace of God tasted death for every man. (1 Tim. ii. 6; Heb. ii. 9.) The world is therefore placed under a dispensation of mercy, the government of it being assigned to Christ in His character of Mediator; so that no man is dealt with upon the rigorous principles of mere law; but all, without exception, are placed under a constitution which provides for the free pardon of their sins, the sanctification of their nature, and their endless happiness in a future state: for Christ is “the Author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him.” (Heb. v. 9.) And of the required obedience every one is capable, not indeed in his own strength, but in the strength of his Saviour’s grace, which is absolutely withheld from none, and is imparted in the richest measure in answer to prayer. For Christ is not only placed before us in the sacred Scriptures as the Redeemer of our race, who shed His blood as our ransom; but as the Fountain of grace to all mankind. To every soul of man He imparts a new and gracious power, by virtue of which all are able to comply with the terms of salvation which are proposed to them; so that all who live and die in their sins “are without excuse.” “In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.” He “was the true Light, which

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lighteth every man that cometh into the world." (John  
i. 4, 9.)

Nor must it be forgotten, that Christ, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the gift of the Holy Ghost, has sent Him to "strive" with sinners in order to their conversion; to convince them of sin, to fill them with alarm and terror, to produce in them a broken and a contrite heart, and to assist them in turning to God in the exercise of repentance and of faith in Christ. The power to believe in Christ with the heart unto righteousness is not an endowment of nature, but an effect of the Holy Spirit's grace; and when that power is put forth in the act of a vital faith, the convicted transgressor, who up to that moment was an ungodly man, is freely and fully forgiven, he is justified from the guilt of all past sin, invested with the privileges of righteousness, and entitled to eternal life. To all who are brought into this happy state of reconciliation with God, the Holy Spirit is given to witness the fact of their personal adoption, to sanctify their nature, to help their infirmities in all the duties of the Christian life, to impress upon them their Saviour's image, and to seal them as the children and heirs of God unto the great day of redemption.

Men are not necessarily saved because they are redeemed by the death of Christ. In love to the world, God gave His only begotten Son, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John iii. 16.) Then, notwithstanding God's love to our fallen world, and notwithstanding the gift of His Son to assume their nature, and die in their

stead; unless they actually and personally believe in Him, they will fall short of eternal life, and perish for ever.

The doctrine of redemption, then, demonstrates the reality of Divine providence, explains its nature, and suggests the purposes to which it is specially directed. Its arrangements all coincide with the designs of our Saviour's mercy in the spread of His Gospel, the conversion of sinners, and the edification of believers in faith and holy love. At the same time they declare His hatred of sin in all its forms, and show that no one can persist in the practice of it with impunity. Under the government of the Son of God, unbelief, productive of a sinful course of action, leads to inevitable misery; and faith, productive of a holy and obedient life, tends directly to happiness, personal, domestic, national, and eternal. Such is the constitution under which mankind are placed, and which no earthly power can alter.

Regarding mankind, then, as fallen in Adam, and redeemed by Christ, we naturally conclude that the providence of God towards them will bear a mixed character; a character of anger, and yet of patience, long-suffering, and mercy: and such is the fact. The penal consequences of the transgression remain, and bear heavily upon mankind in general; and to these must be added the bitter consequences of personal sin: yet, in both cases, suffering is by the grace of Christ mitigated, and made matter of moral and spiritual discipline; and, if men be not wanting to themselves, it will be rendered subservient to their salvation.

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When our first parents, after the fall, had become subject to the uneasy feeling of shame, and were exposed to the injurious effects of the atmosphere, so that clothing was absolutely necessary, and they had no means of providing it; God was pleased, in the tenderness of His mercy, to supply the needful boon, and thus give them proof that they were not absolutely abandoned by Him. This seasonable act of God, thus early put forth, is an affecting display of His clemency. In wrath He remembers mercy. (Gen. iii. 21.)

The earth everywhere bears marks of the original curse. It produces noxious weeds spontaneously, and in destructive profusion,\* and refuses to yield the wholesome grain and nutritious herb, except as the reward of hard toil: so that the sons of Adam are still doomed to eat bread in the sweat of the brow. Yet even this part of the curse is overruled for good, and labour is made a blessing. It occupies the mind, which in its state of alienation from God would otherwise be left to prey upon itself in gloomy sadness: it is a mighty restraint upon the sinful propensities of our fallen nature; and in many of its forms it is even conducive to bodily health. In these respects it is turned into a blessing by the gracious providence of God. Nor is the earth under an absolute malediction. It produces weeds, and many parts of it are sterile and barren; but in other places the soil is rich and fruitful, especially under the hand of a skilful tillage, so that its productions really meet the necessities of the animal creation. In this respect “the earth is full of the goodness

\* See Note D, in the Appendix.

of the Lord ;” and there are “fruitful seasons,” as well as seasons of “blast and mildew.” Along with storms and hurricanes, there are days of sunshine, refreshing dews, and “showers that water the earth.”

Mankind are still, in fulfilment of the original sentence, liable to sickness, pain, and sorrow ; but means of relief are supplied by a merciful providence, in the form of medicine and surgical science, as well as in human sympathy ; and in ten thousand instances these evils, distressing as they may appear, and as they really are in themselves, become a means of the greatest good. When all earthly help is unavailing, the sufferers not unfrequently seek relief in the mercy of God, by turning to Him in penitence and faith unfeigned, and thus obtain, through the sacrifice and intercession of Christ, the substantial blessings of true religion in this world, and in the world to come life everlasting. Thus natural evil becomes a means of moral and spiritual good, and the penalty of sin leads to salvation. The prodigal, suffering the miseries consequent upon his thoughtlessness and profligacy, remembers the plenty there is in his father’s house, and resolves to return thither, where he meets with a kind welcome. This is not a solitary case. True godliness is often the result of sanctified affliction. “When He slew them, then they sought Him : and they returned and inquired early after God.” (Psalm lxxviii. 34.) In other cases piety is greatly increased by the same means. The sufferer often confesses, after much fruitless insubordination, “My soul is even as a weaned child,” (Psalm cxxxii. 2,) having lost the relish for all pleasures but such as lead to God.

To affliction, in one form or another, all mankind are

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doomed, as the degenerate offspring of a degenerate father ; and happy they who, under the chastening hand of God, acknowledge the righteousness of His judgments, renounce the love and practice of sin, and take refuge in His redeeming mercy ! One principal purpose of God in the afflictive dispensations of His providence is the penitence of the sufferers ; and when this purpose is answered, He is prompt to forgive and to save. "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus : Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." "After I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh : I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." "Since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still : therefore My bowels are troubled for him ; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." (Jer. xxxi. 18-20.) Probably few of the persons on whom our Saviour's miracles of healing were wrought would have either believed in Him or loved Him, but for the miseries they suffered, and under the pressure of which they were induced to apply to Him for relief.

Yet we ought not to forget, that human suffering, severe as it frequently is, not only admits of alleviation, and is adapted to the production of beneficial results, but is often transitory in its continuance. If we have times of sickness and disease, we have also times of health ; if we sometimes endure pain, we have also seasons of bodily ease ; and if our minds are liable to depression and sorrow, we have periods of hilarity and gladness. If, in our acts of devotion, we find it necessary to deprecate a thousand evils that flesh is heir to,

we enjoy a thousand blessings, which call for devout thankfulness to the Giver of all good. If we have lost much by the fall, we have already gained much by redemption ; and if we be wise, we shall hereafter gain more than words can express, or mind conceive.

The daughters of Eve, in giving birth to children, share in her sufferings from age to age ; and many a woman, besides the mothers of Benjamin and Jabez, can say respecting an honoured and favourite son, “I bare him with sorrow.” “A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come ;” but hers is not unmixed fear and sorrow : for “as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.” (John xvi. 21.)

Death, which is also included in the penalty of sin, considered in itself, and in connexion with the various forms of disease by which it is often accompanied, is an evil of fearful magnitude. It separates a man from all his earthly possessions, even those which he obtained with labour and difficulty, and upon which he therefore sets a high value ; it dissolves all the endearing and tender relations of domestic and social life ; it for ever terminates our day of grace, removing the unsanctified from every opportunity and means of salvation ; and it reduces the human form to such a state of humiliation and decay, that even the most affectionate survivors desire its removal “out of their sight.” Such is the love of life, that there is not only in men, but in the entire animal creation, a shrinking from death as a dreaded evil.

Yet, by the mediation of Christ, this “enemy,” so

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greatly feared and deprecated, is wonderfully changed in its character ; so that in many cases men not only submit to it without a murmur, but even desire it as an immense benefit. To a pardoned and sanctified believer in Christ it is not only divested of its natural terrors, but is a means of the greatest good. If it separates him from his earthly possessions, it introduces him into the heavenly paradise ; if it removes him from his family and friends, it introduces him to the society of angels and to "the spirits of just men made perfect," to the sight of his Saviour, and to the beatific vision ; and his removal from his pious friends is only temporary. They will soon follow him to the happy land ; for emphatically "blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." Death is to them an end of all suffering in every form and degree. To them the grave is a quiet retreat, where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest ;" and the deathless spirit, freed "from the burden of the flesh," and from every form of evil, is with the Lord in joy and felicity unutterable and endless.

And the reign of death is not eternal. It is, indeed, the last enemy that will be destroyed ; but its destruction is absolutely determined. It shall be "swallowed up in victory," when all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and wake to sleep no more. That some will awake to shame and punishment is the result of their own folly, impenitence, unbelief, and sin ; for they might have been for ever saved. But "the dead in Christ" shall arise in a different manner, and to a very different end. Their bodies, once vile and corruptible, and buried in dis-

honour, will be “raised in glory,” fashioned like unto the body of their glorified Saviour; and in this state they shall be caught up to meet Him in the air; and “so shall they be ever with the Lord.”

To this blessed consummation all the dispensations of providence and all the ordinances of religion at present tend; and the true wisdom of all is so to enter into the designs of their Lord as to secure this great purpose of their being and redemption. “This is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John vi. 40.)

In this manner sin and its curse are effectually obliterated by the intervention of Christ, as the Redeemer and Saviour of men; and the fallen sons of Adam are raised to a state of blessedness immensely surpassing that from which he fell. Towards the furtherance of this great scheme the providence of God has been in actual operation from the foundation of the world, and will be till the end of time. It prepared the way for the coming of Christ, and provides the means whereby He shall be made known to the ends of the earth.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IN ITS RELATION TO THE ANGELIC WORLD.

It is one of the peculiar excellencies of Holy Scripture, that it reveals a spiritual world, not as a matter of mere speculation, but as intimately connected with the world in which we live. But for that revelation we should have known nothing of those supernatural agencies which bear upon the human race both for good and evil. Without taking into our account the Scripture doctrine concerning angels, our views of God's providence in the government of mankind must necessarily be incomplete, and even erroneous. Of this doctrine we will therefore take a brief and condensed survey, making Scripture, as much as possible, its own interpreter.

Angels, of course, are creatures of God. He created the heavens and the earth, with all that they contain, whether visible or invisible. (Exod. xx. 11; Col. i. 16.) Angels are spirits, and therefore not objects of bodily sense. (Psalm civ. 4; Heb. i. 7.) However near they may be to us, we can neither see nor feel them. Whenever, therefore, they are said to have "appeared" to men, and to have "spoken" to men, they have assumed a bodily form and bodily organs for the occasion. As spirits, they are intellectual beings, possessed

of knowledge, of memory, of will, of consciousness, of various affections, and of the power of self-motion. They "excel in strength," and will never die. (Psalm ciii. 20; Luke xx. 36.) In their creation they were all perfectly holy; for nothing unholy can ever proceed from the God of infinite purity. In this state they must all have been happy; for they were the objects of God's delight and love, and had a perfect consciousness of their moral rectitude before Him. We know not the exact period of their creation; but they are understood to have been present when "the foundations of the earth were laid," and to have "shouted for joy" on witnessing that manifestation of Almighty power. (Job xxxviii. 7.)

They exist in vast numbers, perhaps beyond all human power of calculation. St. Paul describes them as "an innumerable company." (Heb. xii. 22.) Our Saviour speaks of "more than twelve legions of angels," whose services He could have commanded in His agony. (Matt. xxvi. 53.) David mentions "many thousands of angels" as being present at the giving of the law. (Psalm lxviii. 17.) When Daniel beheld in vision "the Ancient of Days," he says, "thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him." (Dan. vii. 10.) St. John also "heard the voice of many angels round about the throne;" "and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." (Rev. v. 11.)

The angels are of various orders. They are therefore spoken of as "thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers," as well as "cherubim" and "seraphim:"

(Col. i. 16; Gen. iii. 24; Isaiah vi. 2;) but what these terms properly signify in this relation, we must die to know. They indicate dignity and subordination; but to what extent, and in what particular manner, the angels of God possess and exercise authority over one another, we know not; and on such subjects conjecture is vain. The inspired writers make mention of "the archangel," and of "Michael the archangel;" (1 Thess. iv. 16; Jude 9;) but whether he is the only being to whom this title belongs, or is one of an order, has never yet been determined among critics and theologians. Some think that "the archangel" is one of the titles of our blessed Lord; but in 1 Thess. iv. 16, "the Lord," which is His appropriate and recognised designation, appears to be clearly distinguished from "the archangel." "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven *with* a shout, *with* the voice of the archangel, and *with* the trump of God." Christians in general appear to have thought that there is an order of created spirits to whom the title of archangels belongs; and hence in the Liturgy of the Established Church the communicants are taught to say, "Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Thy glorious name."

That a part of the angels renounced their allegiance to God, forfeited their happiness, and the rank which they were created to occupy in the scale of being, is the undoubted teaching of Holy Scripture. They are described as "the angels that sinned," (2 Peter ii. 4,) and "the angels which kept not their first estate," or their "principality." (Jude 6.) The exact nature of their sin is not specified by the sacred writers; but it is

generally thought to have been pride. This opinion is inferred from 1 Tim. iii. 8, where St. Paul directs that "a novice," or a young convert, should not be invested with the pastoral office, lest, in consequence of his inexperience, he should be "lifted up with pride," and "fall into the condemnation of the devil." This may be the meaning of the text, but it is not absolutely certain. The phrase, "condemnation of the devil," may indeed mean the sin which was the ground of his "condemnation;" or it may mean the sentence of "condemnation" which was passed upon him by the offended Lawgiver; just as all who live and die in their sins are consigned to the "everlasting fire," which was first "prepared for the devil and his angels." Men may fall into "the condemnation of the devil" without falling into the identical sin of which he was guilty, and for which he was condemned.

The number of the angels that fell we know not, nor the proportion they bear to the angels of God. This fact, however, is observable,—their numbers are never magnified, as are the numbers of those who retain their original character, and are the servants of their Maker's will. One of them indeed claimed to belong to a company, of whom he said, "My name is legion; for we are many." (Mark v. 9.) Yet the impression which the general statements of Scripture leave upon our minds is, that the fallen angels form a comparatively small minority. It would appear that they belong to different orders; for they are called "principalities" and "powers." (Eph. vi. 12; Col. ii. 15.) Yet they are all confederated under one head and leader, who is spoken of as "the devil," "Satan," "the prince of this

world," "the god of this world," "the prince of the power of the air ;" (Matt. xiii. 39 ; Luke xxii. 31 ; John xii. 31 ; 2 Cor. iv. 4 ; Eph. ii. 2;) and the rest of the rebel host are all called "his angels :" (Matt. xxv. 41 :) a clear indication that they are subordinate to him, and execute his purposes.

At what time the standard of rebellion against God was first raised among the angels is not stated in the sacred volume, which is our only authority in cases of this kind. This only we know, that the fall of the angels took place before the fall of man ; the ruin of our race being effected by the machinations of "that old serpent, the devil and Satan," who headed the apostasy in heaven.

The case of the fallen angels is perfectly hopeless. "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness," "unto the judgment of the great day." (2 Peter ii. 4 ; Jude 6.) Their wickedness is represented as absolute and unmitigated. No amount of either spiritual or moral good is ever ascribed to any one of them in the word of God ; but rather a perfect enmity to Him, and to mankind as His creatures. They "believe" that there is a God, and "tremble" before Him ; (James ii. 19;) but they love Him not ; and their misery is never spoken of as a salutary discipline, intended to improve their character, and to prepare them for a state of happiness. Nor are they ever mentioned as objects of redeeming mercy. Christ is "the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe ;" (1 Tim. iv. 10;) but He is never said to be the Saviour of devils. He is the "Mediator between God and men ;" (1 Tim. ii. 5;) but He is nowhere

said to sustain that relation to the fallen angels who were expelled from heaven. "For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham. In all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren" of mankind, "that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." (Heb. ii. 16, 17.) Why fallen men are redeemed and saved, and the fallen angels are left to perish, we know not. This is another of those "secret things" which "belong unto the Lord our God," and not to us, at least for the present. To indulge ourselves in speculations on this subject, in the absence of all evidence, is rash and unprofitable. That there are wise and holy reasons for this part of the Divine conduct no one can doubt; and it is not by chance, but design, that those reasons are concealed from us. At present we only "know in part," and must submit to "walk by faith, not by sight;" (2 Cor. v. 7;) resting in the assured belief, that, although the judgments of God are a "great deep," and "His ways past finding out," yet, when they are understood, they will be for ever confessed to be worthy of the infinite perfection of His nature. "Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints." (Rev. xv. 3.)

Though the fallen angels are held in chains of darkness, and are doomed to hopeless misery by the just judgment of God, they have access to the minds of men, and are permitted otherwise to interfere with human affairs. These facts are not only obscurely hinted at in a few ambiguous texts, and therefore matters of uncertain

inference, but are strikingly prominent both in the Old Testament and the New.

In the garden of Eden Satan acted simply as a tempter; but since the fall of Adam, and of his posterity in him, the power of the wicked one has become more formidable, and is especially manifested in heathen countries, where he is said to have his "seat," or to have fixed his throne. (Rev. ii. 13.) Here he impresses his own character upon the religion, the legislation, and the general manners of the people, stimulating them to worship idols in the use of cruel and polluting rites, to acts of injustice and oppression, and to murderous wars; for he "worketh in the children of disobedience," darkening their understandings, perverting their consciences, inflaming their passions, and prompting them to acts too hateful to be named. Their dark character is drawn by the pen of inspiration, which represents them as little less than fiends incarnate. (Rom. i. 24-32.)

The Holy Scriptures connect the evil one with all the various forms of sin that have prevailed in the world. He stimulated David to number the people of Israel, apparently as a matter of national pride; (1 Chron. xxi. 1; 2 Sam. xxiv. 1;) he strenuously opposed the rebuilding of the temple, and the re-establishment of the Mosaic forms of worship, after the Babylonian captivity, stirring up the heathen against the people of God; (Zech. iii. 1, 2;) and he was concerned in all the troubles by which Job was so severely tried. To his temptations the Son of God was subjected for forty days between His baptism and His entrance upon His public ministry; but in this case he was effectually

resisted and foiled in every attack. (Matt. iv. 1-11.) At the close of our Saviour's life Satan's assaults upon Him were renewed, but still without success. He therefore said, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me." (John xiv. 30.) He stimulated the Jews to put our Lord to death; and hence His address to the band of armed men who came to apprehend Him in the garden of Gethsemane: "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." (Luke xxii. 53.)

The period of our Lord's manifestation in the flesh was an age of scepticism. The Sadducees, a powerful and erudite sect among the Jews, denied not only the resurrection of the dead, but also the existence of angels and spirits. (Acts xxiii. 8.) As a tangible refutation of their errors, evil spirits were permitted to take possession of several individuals, men, women, and children, and to inflict upon them grievous torments. One of them had in a former age "troubled" Saul, the apostate king of Israel. (1 Sam. xvi. 14, 15, 23; xviii. 10.) Sometimes the evil spirits deprived the unhappy persons who were under their power of their sight, speech, and hearing, rendering them blind, deaf, and dumb; (Matt. xii. 22; Mark ix. 25;) taking away their power of self-control, throwing them into the fire, and into the water, to destroy them; (Mark ix. 22;) inspiring them with mischievous propensities, so as to render them objects of terror to all who came near them. (Matt. viii. 28.) Of one of these miserable men it is said that he "ware no clothes, neither abode in any house;" "neither could any man bind him, no, not with chains; because he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder

by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones." (Luke viii. 27; Mark v. 3-5.)

Some sceptical philosophers and divines have maintained that there was nothing preternatural in these cases, notwithstanding the manner in which the sacred writers invariably speak of them: that is, in fact, that they were simply cases of bodily disease. The answer is, that Holy Scripture clearly distinguishes between demoniacs and persons who were suffering from bodily disease. "And they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy." (Matt. iv. 24.) Demoniacs are here spoken of as a distinct class of people, different from those who suffered from common diseases, both mental and bodily. But, in opposition to this theory, we would particularly observe that our Saviour treated all these cases as examples of diabolical possession; and he is a bold man who will charge the Son of God with error, or with intentional deception. Did He, who not only "came to bear witness to the truth," but is "the Truth" itself, pander to the popular superstitions of mankind, and designedly confirm them in their delusions? Such a dishonourable opinion of Him can never be entertained by those who sincerely believe the Scripture account of His office and character.

As our Saviour by His power and mercy rescued the miserable sufferers from the grasp of demons, so will He

by His Gospel and the mighty operations of His Spirit overthrow the dominion which Satan and his infernal associates have long usurped over the nations of the earth. When the seventy disciples returned from their mission, and reported to their Lord that "the devils were subject to them through His name," He answered, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven," (Luke x. 17, 18,)—an indication of the final subversion of Satan's kingdom in the world. When He was near the end of His ministry He said to His disciples, "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." (John xii. 31, 32.) Upon His cross, "having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." (Col. ii. 15.)

A power to relieve demoniacs our Saviour conferred upon the whole of His apostles, as well as a power instrumentally to "heal the sick," and to "raise the dead;" (Matt. x. 8;) and of the people that should believe in Him through their ministry He said, "In My name shall they cast out devils." (Mark xvi. 17.) The relief of the damsel at Philippi, who was possessed of "a spirit of divination," (Acts xvi. 18,) and of many similar cases at Ephesus, by St. Paul, are examples of the exercise of this power. (Acts xix. 12.) But when "certain vagabond Jews," unauthorized by Christ, and destitute of faith in Him, affected this power, they not only sustained a mortifying defeat, but even suffered great personal injury. "There were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know,

and Paul I know ; but who are ye ? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded." (Acts xix. 14-16.) It is not by human power, but the power of God and of His Christ, that these wicked and miserable beings can be effectually subdued.

One object of the Gospel ministry among the Gentiles is the turning of the people "from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." (Acts xxvi. 18.) Heathen converts to Christianity are therefore said to be "delivered from the power of darkness," and "translated into the kingdom of" God's "dear Son." (Col. i. 13.) The same view of personal conversion, in every case, is given by our blessed Lord. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace : but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils." (Luke xi. 21, 22.) Such is the power of Christ, which He is pleased to display when He rescues the souls of men from the dominion of the wicked one, and places them under His own gracious and peaceful reign. Yet if the men who are thus blessed and saved cease to watch and pray, and indulge themselves in a state of false security, they will inevitably relapse into their former condition of misery and sin. For "when the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest ; and finding none, he saith, I will return into the house whence I came out. And when He cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits

more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first." (Luke xi. 24-26.)

Against a state so fearful as that of backsliders and apostates, which our Saviour has here described, Christian people are earnestly warned in the New Testament. As believers in Christ, they are no longer under Satanic dominion, nor led captive by the devil at his will; but they are still exposed to his temptations, which are presented in every variety of form, and by an invisible enemy, whose subtlety and malice know no bounds. For the purpose of effectual deception, he is sometimes "transformed into an angel of light." (2 Cor. xi. 14.) Mention is made of his "wiles," as well as of his "fiery darts;" (Eph. vi. 11, 16;) and believers, well-instructed in the things of God, are "not ignorant of his devices." (2 Cor. ii. 11.) He bears emphatically the name of "the tempter." (1 Thess. iii. 5; Matt. iv. 3.) As a declaration of his intense and restless malice, he is spoken of as an "adversary," who, "as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter v. 8.) Their duty therefore is to be "sober" and "vigilant," prepared for every onset; to take to themselves "the whole armour of God," to pray always, and to "resist" the enemy, "steadfast in the faith," encouraged by the assurance of the Divine strength and protection, and that, if they "resist the devil," he will "flee" from them. (1 Peter v. 9; Eph. vi. 11, 13, 18; James iv. 7.) If they fail in any of these things, they fall an easy prey, of which some sad examples are set before us in God's holy word. Yielding to a covetous disposition, which appears to have been the besetting sin

of Judas, Satan entered into his heart, so that he fell from his apostolic appointment, and plunged himself into guilt and misery unutterable, from which he sought relief in self-destruction. (John xiii. 27; Matt. xxvii. 5.) Ananias and Sapphira, cherishing, as it would seem, a similar feeling, agreed together, at Satan's instigation, to "tempt the Spirit of the Lord," and thus brought upon themselves "swift destruction." (Acts v. 1-10.) These examples are placed before us as warnings, that every one who "thinketh he standeth" may "take heed lest he fall;" for Satan hath desired to have the whole of Christ's disciples, that he may sift them as wheat. (1 Cor. x. 12; Luke xxii. 31.) He is present in Christian assemblies, diverting the attention of the people from the truths of the Gospel, that he may prevent their conversion and consequent religious fruitfulness. (Mark iv. 15.)

It is not against individual believers only that the hostility of Satan is directed, but against the spread of the Gospel, and against the entire body of Christian people. Oftener than once he succeeded in hindering St. Paul in the prosecution of his evangelical labour; (1 Thess. ii. 18; Rom. i. 13; xv. 22;) most probably by stirring up the enemies of the truth to imprison him. Our Saviour warned the church at Smyrna, that the devil would cast some of them "into prison," that they "might be tried;" (Rev. ii. 10;) and doctrines opposed to His truth and ordinances, entertained in the church at Thyatira, He describes as "the depths of Satan." (Rev. ii. 24.) Judging from these cases, we conclude that the heretical opinions and the persecutions which have afflicted the church of God are all to

be traced to that foul spirit, who was “a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth.”

And yet, formidable as is the power of Satan, and of the infernal hosts associated with him in his schemes of sin and misery, that power is under restraint, and will not be exercised in perpetuity.

“In vain doth Satan rage his hour,  
Beyond his chain he cannot go.”

He confessed that God had “set an hedge about” His servant Job, “and about his house, and about all that he had on every side;” so that, until that “hedge” was removed, he could not come near that favoured man; (Job i. 10, 12; ii. 6;) and the “legion” acknowledged that they could not enter into even the “herd of swine,” unless Jesus would give them leave. (Luke viii. 32.) St. Paul’s “thorn in the flesh,” which to him was a matter of salutary discipline, was inflicted by a “messenger of Satan,” who was allowed thus to “buffet” him. (2 Cor. xii. 7.) By the interposition of God the temptations of good men are moderated, so as to be proportioned to the strength of individual sufferers; a way is also provided for their escape; and an eternal reward is promised to all them that prove faithful to their Lord and to their profession. (1 Cor. x. 13; James i. 12; 1 Peter i. 7.)

It would appear from Rev. xx., that a period will arrive when Satan will be bound, so as to be deprived of the power which he now exerts in the world; and that afterwards, for a short time, that restraint will be removed, and he will again go forth to deceive the nations, before the sentence of condemnation will be

finally pronounced upon him by the Almighty Judge. These are mysteries of Providence, which we profess not to unravel. They will be made plain by events, which God will bring to pass in His own time.

Widely different are the angels of God, both in their character and employment, from the wicked and miserable beings of whom we have now been speaking. They retain the spotless purity and righteousness with which they were invested at their creation; they are devoted worshippers of God, and are placed before us as examples of holy obedience; so that when we pray to our heavenly Father, we are taught to say, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." (Matt. vi. 10.)

The Scripture doctrine concerning these holy and happy spirits is full of instruction and encouragement. Whatever authority they may possess over one another, they possess none over mankind. For "to which of the angels said He at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?" (Heb. i. 13.) They are not seated at the right hand of God, as being associated with Him in the government of the universe. This honour is reserved exclusively for the Son. "Unto the angels hath He not put in subjection the world to come;" by which we understand the evangelical dispensation. (Heb. ii. 5.) Numerous and powerful as they are, every one of them, to whatever order he may belong, is placed in subjection to Christ in His character of Mediator. To Him "all power is given in heaven," as well as "in earth." (Matt. xxviii. 18.) He "is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him." (1 Peter iii. 22.) They

therefore "stand" before the throne, in the attitude of servants, ready to execute His will, both in judgment and mercy; (Rev. vii. 11;) but they have no authority to alter any doctrine or ordinance of Christ. If they should dare to do it, they would bring upon themselves an instant malediction. (Gal. i. 8.)

As Christ sustained the office of Mediator from the time of the fall, (for there is not, nor ever has been, any other Saviour of sinners,) so we conclude that the angels were His servants under former dispensations of religion, and executed the commissions that He gave them. It was at His command, then, that the two angels visited Lot in Sodom, and hastened his escape before the city was destroyed. (Gen. xix. 1, 15.) He sent the angel, with a drawn sword in his hand, to withstand the prophet Balaam, when, to obtain "the wages of unrighteousness," that doubleminded man was intent upon cursing the Israel of God. (Num. xxii. 31.) When David for a corrupt purpose numbered the people of Israel, an angel was sent to inflict upon them a pestilential disease, of which no less than seventy thousand men died in three days. (2 Sam. xxiv. 15, 16.) At a later period one of these mighty beings was sent on a similar errand, and in one night "smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and four score and five thousand men." (Isai. xxxvii. 36.) And when Herod, the persecutor of the church, had the presumption to usurp Divine honours, "the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten up of worms, and gave up the ghost." (Acts xii. 23.)

But "judgment" is the Lord's "strange work," and the angels are more frequently employed by Him as

the ministers of His mercy. They announced the future birth of Christ, and of His forerunner; (Luke i. 13, 28, 31;) they declared and celebrated the birth of the Saviour when it occurred; (Luke ii. 9-14;) they all worshipped Him on the joyful occasion of His incarnation; (Heb. i. 6;) they warned Joseph and Mary of Herod's murderous intention respecting the child Jesus, and gave directions as to His safety; (Matt. ii. 13, 19;) they ministered to Him after His temptation in the wilderness; (Matt. iv. 11;) one of them appeared to strengthen Him in His agony in the garden of Gethsemane. (Luke xxii. 43.) Angels were present at His resurrection, and declared the fact to the early visitors at His sepulchre; (Luke xxiv. 4,) and they attended Him on the occasion of His ascension, when He had accomplished the work of our redemption by His death. (Acts i. 10.)

Angels take a lively interest in the scheme of human salvation; so that "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow," are "things they desire to look into;" (1 Peter i. 12;) and to them is "made known by the church the manifold wisdom of God:" (Eph. iii. 10:) its purchase by Christ, the calling of its members, its unity, its ordinances, its ministry, its organization, its persecutions, the holy zeal and fidelity of its members, its spiritual declensions and revivals, its sanctification, and final glory, all presenting striking manifestations of the providence and grace of God, who is "great in counsel, and mighty in work." (Jer. xxxii. 19.)

The ministry of angels is employed in the furtherance of the Gospel. When the apostles were imprisoned

in Jerusalem, angels opened their prison-doors, and restored them to their ministry; (Acts v. 19; xii. 7;) an angel sent Philip to impart evangelical instruction to the Ethiopian stranger, returning from Jerusalem to his native land, prepared to receive the truth, and seeking for it in the Bible; (Acts viii. 26;) an angel directed Cornelius to send for the apostle Peter, that he and his family might receive a knowledge of the Gospel and be saved; (Acts x. 8;) and the "Revelation of Jesus Christ," the last of the inspired books, Christ "sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John." (Rev. i. 1; xxii. 16.) Angels are in all the worshipping assemblies of Christian people; and St. Paul urges their presence as a motive to the maintenance of a due decorum in all persons who are present. (1 Cor. xi. 10.) Christian worship upon earth should, as much as possible, resemble the worship of heaven, in seriousness, reverence, and spirituality, that the angels may witness it with delight.

That angels render important services to mankind individually, and take a kind interest in their welfare, is a prominent doctrine of Holy Scripture. They attend upon little children; (Matt. xviii. 10;) they rejoice at the repentance of a sinner, as a shepherd rejoices at the recovery of a lost sheep; (Luke xv. 7;) and the whole of them, of every rank and order, minister unto the heirs of salvation. (Heb. i. 14.) The services which they render are doubtless numerous and important; but those services, and the benevolent beings who render them, are wisely concealed from our view. The glory of the angels would dazzle and overpower our feeble sight; and we should be in continual danger of giving

to them the honour which is due only to their Lord and ours. When Daniel saw an angel, he “stood trembling,” and “retained no strength;” (Dan. x. 8, 11;) when the women saw an angel in the sepulchre of our Lord, “they were affrighted;” (Mark xvi. 5;) when Cornelius “looked on” the angel that visited him, “he was afraid;” (Acts x. 4;) and when St. John saw the angel that Christ sent to him, he so far lost his recollection and self-command as to fall down in an act of worship before the heavenly messenger, for which he received an instant reproof. (Rev. xix. 10; xxii. 9.) Such is the tenderness of our Saviour’s mercy, that He sends His angels to visit and serve us; but He exempts us from the terror which the sight of them would necessarily inspire, and from the temptation of rendering them religious homage.

“ And is there care in heaven? and is there love  
     In heavenly spirits to these creatures base,  
 That may compassion of their evils move?  
     There is; or else more wretched were the case  
     Of man than beasts. But O the exceeding grace  
     Of highest God! that loves His creatures so,  
     And all His works with mercy doth embrace,  
     That blessed angels He sends to and fro,  
     To serve to wicked men,—to serve His wicked foe.

“ How oft do they their silver bowers leave,  
     To come to succour us that succour want!  
 How oft do they with golden pinions cleave  
     The flitting skies, like flying pursuivant,  
     Against foul fiends to aid us militant!  
 They for us fight, they watch and duly ward,  
     And round about us their bright squadrons plant;  
     And all for love, and nothing for reward;  
 O why should heavenly God to man have such regard?” \*

\* Spenser.

The intercourse between men and angels will be perpetuated in a future state, but under other circumstances. When the beggar Lazarus died, his disembodied spirit, redeemed and sanctified by the blood of Christ, "was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." (Luke xvi. 22.) We have no reason to regard this as a peculiar case. Those kind and holy beings doubtless perform the same service in behalf of all who "die in the Lord," whether little children, or persons of adult age. They wait in the chamber of every dying saint, to perform this office of love; and, while they hear the wailings of bereaved families, rejoice to see the objects of their charge delivered from the burden of the flesh, and from all the miseries of this sinful world, and introduced into the regions of the blessed, where there is neither pain nor sorrow. Commissioned by Christ,—

"A convoy attends,  
A minist'ring host of invisible friends."

Various passages of Holy Scripture intimate that the angels of God, in their ministrations to His people, are opposed by evil spirits, with whom they are therefore placed in collision. One of these heavenly messengers said to Daniel, "From the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withheld me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia." (Dan. x. 12, 13.) St. Jude states that "Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about

the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee." (Jude 9.) The nature and direct occasion of these conflicts we profess not to explain, nor even to understand. We may form conjectures concerning them ; but, after all, they are among the "secret things" which belong to the Lord, and which we must die to know.

When Christ shall come to raise the dead, and to judge the world, He will be attended by all the angels of God, who will "swell the triumph of His train." (Matt. xxv. 31.) "He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." (Matt. xxiv. 31.) At His command, "the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire." (Matt. xiii. 49, 50.) "The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity ; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire : there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." (Matt. xiii. 41-43.)

Here the Scripture account of the ministry of angels ends. When Christ, in His character of Judge, shall have pronounced the final sentence of acceptance upon the just, and of condemnation upon the unjust, and the sentence in both cases is carried into effect, He will deliver up the mediatorial kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all. The grand scheme of providence and redemption will then be completed ; the

mystery of God fulfilled; Christ will "see of the travail of His soul," and be infinitely and eternally "satisfied;" and angels and sanctified men will for ever form one vast assembly of worshippers before the throne of God and of the Lamb.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IN RELATION TO INORGANIC  
MATTER, VEGETATION, AND BRUTE CREATURES.

THE providence of God, which is extended to every object in nature, is a sort of continued creation, no creature being able to sustain itself, any more than it was able to give itself existence. There is no medium between self-existence and dependent existence. Self-existence belongs exclusively to God; and dependent existence is an inseparable characteristic of all other beings. His existence is necessary and unoriginated. Theirs is contingent, depending upon His sovereign will. On this subject two of our old divines have made the following pertinent observations:—

“God’s will in creation maketh a thing to be: His will in preservation maketh it continue to be. The same omnipotency and efficacy of God is necessary to sustain our beings, as at first to create them. Therefore it is said, ‘Thou stretchest out the heavens like a curtain,’ (Psalm civ. 2,) which noteth a continued act. God erected them at first, and still sustaineth them by His secret power in this posture: so that with respect to God it is the same action to conserve as to create. That the creature may have a being, the influence of God is necessary to produce it; that the creature may continue its being, it is necessary that God should not

break off that influence, or forsake the creature so made: for the being of the creature doth so wholly depend on the will of God, that it cannot subsist without Him. Nothing can be without the will of God; which is the cause both of the beginning and existence of all creatures. Therefore their being cannot be continued unless God will. It belongeth to the same power to make any thing out of nothing, and to keep any thing that is made from returning to its first nothing.”\*

“Preserving providence commences from the first instant of the creation. For, as soon as creatures are made, they need a Divine power to preserve them. For this is the strict notion of preservation, as distinguished from a governing providence,—that God upholds all things in being from falling back into their first nothing, and preserves their natural virtues, powers, and faculties, and enables them to act, and to attain the ends of their several natures.” “This is so certain, that I shall make no scruple to say that God can no more make an independent creature, which can subsist without Him, than He can an eternal creature, which shall have no beginning: which is not want of power in God, but a repugnancy and contradiction in the nature of creatures. That which once was not can never be so made as to have no beginning. That which has not a necessary existence (as nothing has which once was not) cannot be made to exist necessarily, without dependence on its cause; because necessary existence is not in its nature; for then it would always have been.”†

\* Manton’s “Christ’s Eternal Existence,” pp. 94, 95. Edit. 1685.

† Sherlock, on Providence, pp. 18, 21. Edit. 1715.

With these reasonings Sir Isaac Newton expresses an entire agreement. "He infers from the structure of the visible world, that it is governed by one almighty and all-wise Being, who rules the world, not as its soul, but as its Lord; exercising an absolute sovereignty over the universe, not as over His own body, but as over His work; and acting in it according to His pleasure, without suffering anything from it." "As the Deity is the Supreme and First Cause, from whom all other causes derive their whole force and energy; so he thought it most unaccountable to exclude Him only out of the universe. It appeared to him much more just and reasonable to suppose that the whole chain of causes, or the several series of them, should centre in Him as their Source and Fountain, and the whole system appear depending upon Him, the only independent Cause."

"Sir Isaac Newton is particularly careful always to represent Him as a Free Agent, being justly apprehensive of the dangerous consequences of that doctrine which introduces a fatal or absolute necessity presiding over all things. He made the world, not from any necessity determining Him, but when He thought fit. Matter is not infinite or necessary; but He created as much of it as He thought proper. He placed the systems of the fixed stars, at various distances from each other, at His pleasure. In the solar system He formed the planets of such a number, and disposed them at various distances from the sun, as He pleased. He has made them all move from west to east, though it is evident from the motions of the comets, that He might have made them move from east to west. In these

and other instances, we plainly perceive the vestiges of a Wise Agent, but acting freely, and with perfect liberty.” \*

These observations apply with special emphasis to the heavenly bodies, of whose creation Moses has stated, “And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night ; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years : and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth : and it was so. And God made two great lights ; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night : He made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness : and God saw that it was good.” (Gen. i. 14–18.)

During six thousand years these mighty orbs have answered the end of their creation, as it is here specified, not by any independent power residing and operating in themselves, but under the direction of the Creator, whose glory they so wonderfully display. So far as we can judge, their number is undiminished, they retain their original brightness, and the regularity of their motions. The sun pours his light and heat upon the earth, so as to illumine and cheer all lands ; the stars are as brilliant as they were in the patriarchal times, when Abraham was directed to survey them, as setting forth by their numbers the teeming nations of his posterity ; (Gen. xv. 5;) and the moon still affords her welcome beams

\* Maclaurin’s “Account of Sir Isaac Newton’s Discoveries,” pp. 377, 380, 382, 383. Edit. 1748.

to nightly travellers by land and sea; all in their several spheres fulfilling the design of their creation. From age to age they "divide the day from the night," they serve "for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years;" they "give light upon the earth;" they "rule over the day and over the night;" and they "divide the light from the darkness." Their regularity, and the benefits of which they are the occasion, the Holy Scriptures ascribe to the providence of God. Our Saviour declares that "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good;" (Matt. v. 45;) thus teaching that the sun, in whose light we rejoice, is God's sun, and that what we call his daily rising is God's act. Every ray of light that the sun emits is God's light, spread upon all lands by His bounty. For "upon whom doth not His light arise?" (Job xxv. 3.)

The agency of God is to be equally acknowledged in the other heavenly bodies. He who "giveth the sun for a light by day," giveth "the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night. The Lord of hosts is His name." (Jer. xxxi. 35.) "He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names." (Psalm cxlvii. 4.) Their regularity and beneficial influence were secured to mankind by express promise from God, addressed to Noah immediately after the waters of the deluge had subsided. He said, "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." (Gen. viii. 22.) The objects here specified are all obtained by the regular movements of the heavenly bodies; and these the Almighty pledges His veracity to perpetuate "while the earth remaineth." The stability

of this covenant with Noah is referred to by God as confirmatory of His covenant with David, in whose family the Messiah was to be born. In the prospect of the Babylonian captivity, the demolition of the temple, the suspension of the Mosaic form of Divine worship, and the disruption of the Jewish nation,—when timid and shortsighted persons, weak in faith, were ready to conclude that God had finally cast off His ancient people, and that the glory had for ever departed from His chosen,—“the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord ; If ye can break My covenant of the day, and My covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season ; then may also My covenant be broken with David My servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne.” “If My covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth ; then will I cast away the seed of Jacob, and David My servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” (Jer. xxxiii. 19–21, 25, 26.)

“There were among the ancients not a few, nor they unlearned, who by a strong fancy conceived in themselves an excellent melody by the motion of the celestial spheres.” “It may well be that this conceit of theirs was grounded upon a certain truth, which is the harmo-nical and proportionable motion of those bodies in their just order and set courses, as if they were ever dancing the rounds or the measures. In which regard the psalmist tells us that ‘He’ (God) ‘appointed the moon for seasons ; and the sun knoweth his going down :’ which words of his may not be taken in a proper but in

a figurative sense ; the prophet implying that the sun observeth his prescribed motion so precisely to a point, that in the least jot he never erreth from it ; and therefore he is said to do the same with knowledge and understanding.”\* With respect to the heavenly luminaries,

“ Who would not think them hung in golden chains ?  
 And so they are ; in the high will of Heaven,  
 Which fixes all, makes adamant of air,  
 Or air of adamant ; makes all of nought,  
 Or nought of all, if such the dread decree.”†

That the agency of God is to be acknowledged in all the changes that take place in the ATMOSPHERE, is also a prominent doctrine of Holy Scripture ; so that all the elements of nature, even the most powerful, and such as human ingenuity can neither direct nor control, are the mere servants of His will. “ Our God is in the heavens : He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased.” (Psalm cxv. 3.) “ Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did He in heaven, and in the earth, in the seas, and in all deep places.” (Psalm cxxxv. 6.)

The dew and the rain are formed by Him, and are given as an expression of His goodness, or withheld as a mark of His displeasure, as the following scriptures declare :—“ God give thee of the dew of heaven.” (Gen. xxvii. 28.) “ Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth.” (Psalm cxlvii. 8.) “ He watereth the hills from His chambers.” (Psalm civ. 13.) “ When He uttereth His voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and He causeth the vapours to

\* Hakewill’s “Apology of the Power and Providence of God,” p. 96, Edit. 1635.

† Young.

ascend from the ends of the earth ; He maketh lightnings with the rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of His treasures." (Jer. x. 13.) "The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as the dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men." (Micah v. 7.) "I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest : and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city : one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered." (Amos iv. 7.) "Seek Him that..... calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth : The Lord is His name." (Amos v. 8.)

The alternations of day and night are of God's appointment ; one as a season of labour, the other as a season of rest, and both adapted to the animal constitution ; neither man nor beast being able to endure incessant toil. "The day is Thine, the night also is Thine : Thou hast prepared the light and the sun." (Psalm lxxiv. 16.) "Thou makest darkness, and it is night." (Psalm civ. 20.) "I form the light, and create darkness." (Isai. xlv. 7.)

Cold and heat are also God's creation. "He giveth snow like wool : He scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes. He casteth forth His ice like morsels : who can stand before His cold ? He causeth His wind to blow, and the waters flow." (Psalm cxlvii. 16-18.) "He saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth." "By the breath of God frost is given." (Job xxxvii. 6, 10.) "Thou hast made summer and winter." (Psalm lxxiv. 17.)

The hand of God is no less to be acknowledged in thunder-storms, which are at once an evidence of His

goodness and of His wrath. They serve to purify the air from noxious vapours, and thus conduce to the general health ; but they are often destructive of property, and even of life : and it is not by chance, but by providential design, that consequences so important are produced. To die by the lightning-stroke is a judgment or a mercy, according to the character of the person upon whom it falls. To be smitten down in a moment in a state of impenitence and guilt is a terrible calamity ; but to be removed from this world of sin and suffering to the heavenly paradise is an immense benefit, in whatever manner the change may be effected. "He thundereth with the voice of His excellency." "God thundereth marvellously with His voice." (Job xxxvii. 4, 5.) "The clouds poured out water : the skies sent out a sound : Thine arrows also went abroad : the earth trembled and shook." (Psalm lxxvii. 17, 18.) "He sent out His arrows, and scattered them ; and He shot out lightnings, and discomfited them." (Psalm xviii. 14.) "The Lord shall be seen over them, and His arrow shall go forth as the lightning." (Zech. ix. 14.) "The God of glory thundereth." (Psalm xxix. 3.)

The winds are no less under the direction and control of the Almighty, and are instruments by which He fulfils His purposes of mercy and of judgment. While they also purify the atmosphere, they not unfrequently cause a fearful destruction of property, and even of life, especially among seafaring men. Storms and hurricanes at sea are the dread of merchants, and of the men whom they employ in the conveyance of their goods from one country to another. "He bringeth the wind out of His treasures." (Psalm cxxxv. 7.) "The Lord sent

out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea." (Jonah i. 4.) "He causeth His wind to blow." (Psalm cxlvii. 18.) "Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them." (Exod. xv. 10.) "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep. For He commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which liftest up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble." (Psalm cvii. 23-26.) "Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind." (Psalm xlviii. 7.)

Various forms of disease, which come under the general denomination of pestilence, are usually produced by the state of the atmosphere: and in these calamitous visitations the hand of God is concerned, whatever second causes may be in operation. They are all subordinate to Him. "The Lord shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, till He have consumed thee from off the land." (Deut. xxviii. 21.) "I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence." (Jer. xiv. 12.) "I will punish them that dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence." (Jer. xliv. 13.) "I have sent among you the pestilence, after the manner of Egypt." (Amos iv. 10.)

God's interposition in respect of the sea is often mentioned by the sacred writers. At the time of the creation He separated its waters from the dry land, by causing them to flow into the vast channel He had provided for them, and in which they are permanently confined. They are kept in perpetual motion, from age to

age, by the attraction of the moon, and by their own gravitation, which cause the tides alternately to rise and fall; and by this means they are, together with their own saltiness, preserved in their natural state, and kept from sending forth a deadly malaria over the islands and continents of the earth.

“Can yonder moon turn Ocean in his bed,  
From side to side, in constant ebb and flow,  
And purify from stench his watery realms?”

She can, because such is the Almighty's will in constant operation; but not otherwise. Often too are the waters of the great deep agitated by storms and tempests, so that the waves swell like mountains; yet are they kept under constant restraint by the power of God; so that human habitations are with perfect safety erected on their shores. “He hath compassed the waters with bounds, until the day and night come to an end.” (Job xxvi. 10.) “Who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth,.....and set bars and doors, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?” (Job xxxviii. 8, 10, 11.) “Thou hast set a bound that they may not pass over; that they turn not again to cover the earth.” (Psalm civ. 9.) “Fear ye not Me? saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at My presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it.” (Jer. v. 22.) “Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, Thou stillest them.” (Psalm lxxxix. 9.)

The sea, which is thus under the control of Almighty

God, is employed by Him as a means of immense benefit to mankind. By navigation it serves to connect together the remotest nations, and renders the productions of every land the common good of the human family. What is wanting in one clime is supplied by another: so that the people who dwell in cold and sterile regions not only enjoy the ordinary products of their own soil, but are provided with various luxuries which more favoured lands produce. Nor can we overlook the fact, that the sea furnishes, and that upon a large scale, agreeable and nutritious food for mankind, such as our Saviour and His disciples were accustomed to use. After spending a night on "the sea of Tiberias," several of His disciples, on coming to the land, "saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught." He added, "Come and dine." (John xxi. 9, 10, 12.) Here then is a bountiful and unexpensive provision for human want.

The earth, with respect to its solid contents, presents, in a manner no less obvious, rich displays of providential goodness. It supplies the principal materials out of which our houses are constructed; its inexhaustible deposits of coal serve a thousand purposes of comfort and utility; and but for its metallic substances, the most polished nations would be little better than helpless savages. The earth supplies from its bowels material for the most useful implements of civilized life, and its principal ornaments. To other nations, beside the tribes of Israel, Almighty God, in His benevolent providence, has given a land "whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills they may dig brass." (Deut. viii.

9.) But what words can express the value of the vast reservoirs of water contained in the earth, which in perpetuity pour forth their clear, refreshing, and fertilizing streams? In whatever direction we look, above, around, beneath, we cannot but observe the provision which God has made, in the plenitude of His goodness, for the benefit of His human offspring.

The providence of God extends to the whole of His works, among which VEGETABLE NATURE occupies a distinguished place. At the time of the creation, "God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good." (Gen. i. 11, 12.)

The vegetable kingdom, of which the origin is here stated by the inspired historian, presents an endless variety of objects, from the loftiest trees of the forest to the most diminutive flower, whose delicate tints are imperceptible to the naked eye; and they all have in themselves a provision for perpetuating their kind; so that while many of them are exceedingly short-lived, they all exist in undiminished numbers from age to age, and all possess their original peculiarities of shape and character. The manner in which that provision is made available surpasses all human sagacity, and can only be resolved into the Divine agency. A small seed is deposited in the ground, and by the combined action of earth, and water, and heat, and air, and light, expands

itself so as not only to become a shrub or a tree, but other seeds of precisely the same kind, "thirty," "sixty," or even "a hundred fold." An acorn is expanded into a great tree, which, while several successive generations of men are born and die, endures the heats of summer and the blasts of winter, producing every year a plentiful supply of leaves and of acorns, and for centuries afterwards will answer the most valuable purposes in the form of solid timber.

Nor is it less surprising that the earth, by the process of vegetation, among ten thousand objects of immense utility, supplies the fibre of which ropes of vast strength are made, and other textures which possess a power of adhesion that bids defiance to any ordinary force. Yet this material is formed out of particles of earth; and by the action of fire is at once reduced into its native element in the form of a useless powder. The leaves of the mulberry-tree, being devoured by a diminutive worm, are transformed into silk, one of the most useful and ornamental articles of female dress. Who can account for these facts, any further than to say that such is the will of Almighty God?

Other seeds, deposited in the garden or in the field, produce corresponding effects; but in what manner no man can declare. Whence arises the pungency of the onion, the agreeable flavour of the different kinds of fruit, or the pleasant odour of the rose? No human ingenuity has ever been able to discover these qualities in the earth out of which they severally arise. The only satisfactory answer that has yet been given to the inquiry is, that such is the will of God. Independently of His will, the seed could have no expansive

power, any more than a stone or a grain of sand. "But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed his own body." (1 Cor. xv. 38.)

The purposes of vegetation are various, and all expressive of the Divine perfections, especially of power, wisdom, benevolence, and justice. Among these purposes the general benefit of mankind may be confidently specified. One of the most useful things with which they are supplied is timber, which is extensively used as fuel, in the construction of houses, and of almost every kind of building, in agricultural implements, and in navigation; so that without it the most scientific and civilized nations would be pitiable in their helplessness. That an article of such vast utility is so liberally supplied, and supplied in perpetuity, is a signal manifestation of the goodness of God, which calls for a thankful acknowledgment. It was provided for the benefit of mankind before they were themselves created, but in the prospect of their necessities and convenience. Balaam mentions "trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted;" (Num. xxiv. 6;) and the psalmist speaks of "the trees of the Lord," which "are full of sap; the cedars of Lebanon, which He hath planted." (Psalm civ. 16.) In the garden of Eden, "out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food;" (Gen. ii. 9;) and since that garden has disappeared, trees have not been withdrawn, but extended through the wide world.

A second purpose of vegetation is the support of animal life. Were the productions of the earth absolutely cut off, it does not appear that any class of animals could permanently remain; for even those

that are carnivorous live upon such as are vegetarian. When Adam was expelled from the garden of Eden, upon the rich fruits of which he had previously subsisted, it was said to him by his offended Maker, "Thou shalt eat the herb of the field ;" and he was sent forth to "till the ground from whence he was taken," as the means of his future subsistence. (Gen. iii. 18, 23.) The nutritious herb and grain provided for man are obtained by laborious cultivation ; the various kinds of grass and herbage upon which the cattle subsist are, to a great extent, spontaneously produced, and upon a more liberal scale ; but, in both cases, by the hand of God, as He Himself expressly declares. "I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit." (Lev. xxvi. 4.) "I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full." (Deut. xi. 14, 15.) "He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man : that he may bring forth food out of the earth ; and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart." (Psalm civ. 14, 15.) The earth, by supplying herbage for the beasts of the field, supplies animal food for the use of man ; so important is the process of vegetation.

A very impressive ceremony was enjoined upon the Hebrew nation as an acknowledgment of the goodness of God in the fruitfulness of the earth. "The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of

Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest : and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you : on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it." In connexion with this significant rite, they were directed to present "an he lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt offering unto the Lord," together with a "meat offering" and a "drink offering ;" and until they had fulfilled these requirements, they were charged to "eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears." (Lev. xxiii. 9-14.) In this manner they were required to confess their dependence upon God for the fruits of the earth, and to seek a sanctified enjoyment of them. The practical lessons taught by this ceremonial are of permanent obligation. Every harvest should be reaped with thanksgiving to God, and every temporal blessing received as His gift ; the partakers of His bounty putting away all sin, and imploring the forgiveness of it through the blood of the Cross.

Wonderful is the change that passes upon the face of the earth, when the wintry months have passed away, and the genial season of spring returns. All nature bursts into new life, which appears to be little less than a creation. The trees put forth their blossoms ; the springing corn and grass appear as the harbingers of a rich and fruitful autumn. Heedless and undevout men see nothing in these changes but a repetition of what they and their fathers have witnessed before ; but the heavenly-minded psalmist recognised in them the hand of God, and taught us to say, in the spirit of a sincere

devotion, "THOU renewest the face of the earth." (Psalm civ. 30.)

A third purpose which vegetable nature is evidently designed to subserve is that of ornament: and let no one say that ornament is beneath the attention of the great Creator. There is, in truth, a near relation between physical beauty and moral beauty; and both are derived from Him in whom all excellencies are combined. We read in His word of "the beauty of holiness;" (2 Chron. xx. 21;) of "the beauty of the Lord;" (Psalm xxvii. 4;) and an inspired prophet exclaims, "How great is His goodness, and how great is His beauty!" (Zech. ix. 17.) "By His Spirit He hath garnished the heavens." (Job xxvi. 13.) The ornaments of the tabernacle, of the temple, and of the vestments of the high priest, were rich beyond example, and by His appointment. (Exod. xxviii. 3; xxxi. 3, 6; 1 Kings vii. 14.) The animal formations present every imaginable variety of beauty, especially the human frame; and, most of all, the "human face divine," with its intelligent and sparkling eye. In truth, nature's forms are all beautiful in their place, till marred by man; and with beauty the earth is covered. In our gardens, fields, and meadows, we meet with many objects which are obviously designed for ornament, as our Saviour intimated, when He called upon His hearers to "consider the lilies of the field," which "neither toil nor spin," but are "clothed" by the hand of God: and yet He declares that even "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." (Matt. vi. 28, 29.) When the Almighty had made the earth, He threw upon it a robe of beauty, of which the lily is but one among

ten thousand other gems. A meadow, with its rich profusion of flowers of every hue, delights the eye, and gratifies the purest heart.

A fourth object of vegetation is to supply mankind with necessary clothing. In this manner the several kinds of fibre are produced, out of which many of our garments are fabricated: and the sheep, the beaver, and other animals that supply the rest derive the aliment upon which they subsist, and out of which their substance is formed, either directly or indirectly, from the same source: and it is observable, that the supply and the demand are proportioned to each other. The reason is, that the Author of the benefit is unchangeably the same. To the process of vegetation, which is connected with so many benefits and blessings, we may justly apply the words of our Saviour: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." (John v. 17.)

Various maladies are entailed upon mankind in consequence of sin, and to several of them antidotes are provided by the goodness of God. Of these vegetation supplies a full share. An apocryphal writer has therefore justly said, "The Lord hath created medicines out of the earth;" (Ecclus. xxxviii. 4;) which is true of vegetable as well as mineral substances. In the sacred writings we find several references to medical applications, all of which seem to have been of a vegetable kind: such as the anointing of the sick with oil; (James v. 14;) the application of figs to a boil; of ointment to bruises and wounds. (Isai. i. 6; xxxviii. 21.) The "balm of Gilead" appears to have been famous in ancient times; and the skilful "physician," who knew when and how to apply it, was in great repute. (Jer.

viii. 22 ; xlvi. 11 ; li. 8.) The relief of suffering humanity, then, may be justly regarded as another purpose of God in this department of His works.

By the agency of God in vegetable nature, mankind are supplied with food, clothing, and medicine, and the eye is gratified with a thousand forms of beauty in the graceful trees and shrubs and the flowers with which the earth is adorned.

While the productions of the earth display the benevolence of God, in providing for the wants of His helpless and dependent creatures, we discover in them at the same time indications of His righteous displeasure. The earth produces poisonous substances, without any warning of the danger connected with them ; and these not unfrequently extinguish life. The cultivators of the soil also, in every age and clime, feel the force of those awful words addressed by the offended Lawgiver to the father of our race : "Cursed is the ground for thy sake ; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life ; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee." (Gen. iii. 17, 18.) "Thorns and thistles" are a mere specimen of the noxious weeds which interfere with the fruitfulness of the soil, require the incessant vigilance and labour of the husbandman, and, after all, often disappoint his hopes. To these troubles others must be added ; such as the blight, the mildew, excessive rains, or long-continued drought, producing damage to the grain, and rendering the harvest scanty. These things are easily mentioned ; but they cause bitter sorrow, and prove that man is no longer an object of God's unmixed approval. The terrible sanctions of His law are plainly seen in the dispensations of His providence ;

which in effect say to toiling and suffering man, " Know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God ; " (Jer. ii. 19;) and art no longer the holy and happy being that God created, and placed in a garden of security and delights.

Next in the order of God's works, to which His providential care is directed, must be ranked THE IRRATIONAL ANIMALS, which present an extent and variety every way worthy of their Author. Under this denomination we rank the fowls of the air, the beasts of the field, insects and reptiles, and the fishes of the sea. Their numbers are incalculable ; and their modes of life, their external forms, their instincts and habits, are endlessly diversified. Many of them possess a natural sagacity, which bears some analogy to the human intellect ; while others of them appear to be not only destitute of that faculty, but also of bodily senses, which others, again, have in great perfection. Some of them live mostly in the air ; others upon the dry land, or burrowing in the earth ; others find their greatest pleasure, and the means of their subsistence, on the surface of lakes and rivers ; and others again live only in the water ; so that what is life to one would be certain death to another. Their diet is no less diversified. One thing, however, is observable in them all. The constitution of every one of them is complete in itself. In every animal, its conformation, its internal structure, its means of subsistence, its instincts, are perfectly adapted to each other ; so as to demonstrate in the Creator a wise and benevolent design.

That they all engage His attention, and are under

His guardian care, He has explicitly declared. Some of them are very shortlived ; they sport their hour, and then disappear ; and the whole of them are under the law of mortality ; so that, like mankind, they "must needs die." Modern science asserts that immense numbers of brute creatures lived and died before man was made ; and if this be true, it follows that death among irrational animals was not at first introduced in consequence of his sin. Be this as it may, ever since the time of man's creation and fall there has been a constant extinction of animal life ; and the process is going on every hour. Multitudes die by age and disease, and many more die for the subsistence of others ; yet it would appear that the several races exist in undiminished numbers. The reason is given by the inspired psalmist, who, speaking of them, and addressing the Lord their Maker, says, "THOU takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. THOU sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created." (Psalm civ. 29, 30.) We are thus taught that the various classes of animals die by the will of God ; that by the same will others are born, to serve His purpose in the great scheme of His wise and almighty providence ; and that, amidst all the changes that are ever taking place, He preserves the work of His own hands.

In order to their subsistence, they need regular supplies of food, adapted to their several natures ; and this also is provided by the hand of God ; in some instances by means of human intervention, and in others without any human forethought or contrivance. "He causeth grass to grow for cattle," as well as "herb for the service of man." (Psalm civ. 14.) "He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry."

(Psalm cxvii. 9.) He “feedeth the fowls of the air.” (Matt. vi. 26.) Having mentioned the various classes of animals that live and move in earth and air and sea, the psalmist, in a beautiful descent upon the goodness of God, exclaims, “These all wait upon Thee ; that Thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That Thou givest them they gather : Thou openest Thine hand, they are filled with good.” (Psalm civ. 27, 28.) “The eyes of all wait upon Thee ; and Thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.” (Psalm cxlv. 15, 16.) What a view do these texts give us of the Divine goodness ! What a family does the great Parent of all provide for, daily, and in perpetuity ! All creatures through the wide extent of the universe live upon His bounty.

In other respects, also, besides that of food, He is concerned for the well-being of His whole sentient creation : for His eye observes every sparrow that falls to the ground ; (Matt. x. 29;) and He assigned as a reason why He should spare Nineveh when the people were generally penitent, that it contained “much cattle.” (Jonah iv. 11.) “O Lord, Thou preservest man and beast.” (Psalm xxxvi. 6.) “The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works.” (Psalm cxlv. 9.) The care which the various kinds of animals manifest for their young is a demonstrative and affecting proof of Divine providence ; for that care is not the result of reflection, but of instinct, of which God who created them is the Author.

Several of the brute creatures are carnivorous, having an insatiable appetite for flesh, being furnished with

claws and other appliances for seizing their prey, and using it as an appropriate aliment. Creatures of this kind are mostly strong, and the animals upon which they feed are generally timid and feeble. The hawk seizes the gentle dove, and the eagle the harmless lamb. Considering, then, the powerful instincts of the carnivorous animals, the peculiarities of their formation, and the fact that flesh is their necessary food, it would appear to be not an accident, or a casualty, but a part of the Almighty's plan, that some of His creatures should live upon the rest. It has indeed been suggested, that such a state of things implies a reflection upon the Divine goodness ; but we shall do well to pause before we adopt such a conclusion. By the means now specified, some classes of animals are held in check, which would otherwise so multiply as to become an intolerable nuisance in our houses,—rats and mice in particular. It should also be observed that death is the common lot of the animal tribes ; and that, so far as the brute creatures are themselves concerned, the time of their death is a matter of no moment. They have no conscience, no sense of accountability to God, and therefore nothing either to hope or fear in a future state. They are therefore never unprepared to die, as is the case with sinful men : and to be suddenly slain in the midst of their enjoyments, is in their case unquestionably preferable to a lingering death, caused by disease, or by a gradual decay of nature. But whatever may be the manner in which brute creatures die, it is undeniable that while they live they are supplied with means of enjoyment adapted to their respective natures ; so that the whole of them, in their several degrees, partake

of the Divine goodness. The mole, for instance, is a stranger to the pleasure of the lion in ranging the forest, the eagle in scaling the heavens, the peacock in exhibiting his splendid plumage ; but the mole, for anything we know to the contrary, has means of gratification which these creatures never felt.

Several of the animal tribes are migratory. At certain seasons of the year birds in immense numbers pass from one country to another in quest of more congenial climes. We call them "dumb creatures," because we do not understand their language. They have, however, a language with which they are themselves familiar, and travel in companies for mutual safety, and at the times which are the best suited to their migrations. "The stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times ; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming." (Jer. viii. 7.) The "appointed times" here mentioned, which these creatures so accurately "observe," are not times of which the arrangement is left to themselves ; for they are not capable of such forethought ; but times determined by Him who made them, and who extends to them His fatherly care. At certain seasons of the year particular kinds of fish come in vast shoals to localities where they are needed ; sent by a bountiful Providence to meet the wants of the hungry people who inhabit those places ; and who, but for these supplies, would find it difficult to obtain the "food" which is "convenient" for them.

Whether the ferocity of the carnivorous animals will cease at some future period of the world's history, is a question on which the opinions of good men are divided. A beautiful picture of such a state of things is given by

Isaiah, when “the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together ; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed ; their young ones shall lie down together : and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain : for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (Isai. xi. 6-9.) Whether these terms are to be literally or figuratively understood, time will show. The scene here described by the prophet was in all probability witnessed in the garden of Eden before the fall, whatever may, at the same time, have been the state of things in the wide world.

In his primitive state man was invested with full dominion over the whole animal creation ; but since the fall his condition in this respect has undergone an important change. There are animals now which not only deny his authority over them, but are to him objects of terror. Nor can it be denied that, in several instances, God has employed the inferior animals as the instruments of His wrath against apostate and rebellious men. When the people of Egypt set Him at defiance, He plagued them by frogs, lice, flies, and locusts, all of which gave them terrible personal annoyance ; and some of them entirely destroyed the produce of the land. (Exod. viii. 5-24 ; x. 12-15.) When the children of Israel murmured against God and against Moses for bringing them out of Egypt, “the Lord sent fiery

serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died." (Num. xxi. 6.) When a prophet was sent to Bethel, to bear testimony against the idolatry which Jeroboam had introduced among the ten revolted tribes of Israel, and "was disobedient to the word of the Lord," "the Lord delivered him unto a lion, which tore and slew him," as the punishment of his sin. (1 Kings xiii. 26.) At a later period, the people that took possession of the country from which the ten tribes were carried away captives "feared not the Lord: therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which slew some of them." (2 Kings xvii. 25.)

In the time of the prophet Joel the sins of the Hebrew people were punished by the palmerworm, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, which to a fearful extent devoured the produce of the country, and produced a terrible scarcity of food. As the nation still remained impenitent, the Almighty threatened to send among them clouds of locusts, which should darken the heavens, strip every tree of its leaves and fruit, consume every blade of grass, and leave the country, rich before them as the garden of Eden, a desolate wilderness. The prophet called the nation to repentance, as the only means of averting the calamity; and in case of their refusal declared, "The Lord shall utter His voice before His army: for His camp is very great: for He is strong that executeth His word: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?" (Joel ii. 11.)

In our own times it occasionally happens that a man loses his life from the blow of a vicious horse, or a push

from the horn of an infuriated bull; but such calamities are not of frequent occurrence. The inferior animals are rather employed as the instruments of a benevolent providence. To the labour of the horse we are mainly indebted for the bread which is daily placed upon our tables: for it is this noble animal that draws the plough, and brings the harvest home; and without him the most skilful and laborious husbandman, in the cultivation of the soil, would be a pitiable object of helplessness and misery. The most substantial part of our clothing is derived from the sheep; and how much we are indebted to them, to the ox, and to other animals, for our daily supplies of food, let the shambles of every town, and the arrangements of every family, declare. And from whom are all these benefits, and ten thousand others of a similar kind, really derived? God Himself has supplied the answer, in the announcement which He made to mankind immediately after the deluge. "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things." (Gen. ix. 1-3.)

For benefits of such inestimable value, so widely diffused, and so freely given, the gratitude of all mankind is justly due to the Giver of all good; and, at the same time, a humane treatment of the inferior animals is imposed upon us as matter of absolute duty. To treat them with cruelty, by inflicting upon them pain beyond

what is strictly necessary, to withhold from them the quantity of food which their nature requires, or to extort from them an amount of labour beyond their strength, is not only cruel to them, but an act of impiety to God, whose creatures they are, who claims the proprietorship of them all, and who has subjected them to the *use* of man, but not to the wantonness of his tyrannic will. "A righteous man," mindful of his responsibility, "regardeth the life of his beast;" (Prov. xii. 10;) for such is the Creator's requirement; and all who violate it must answer to Him for their misconduct. Many precepts in the Mosaic code enjoin a kind and considerate treatment of the inferior creatures. The ox, when treading out his master's corn, was not to be muzzled, but allowed freely to eat of it; (Deut. xxv. 4;) an ass that had fallen under its burden was to be promptly relieved, even if its owner were an enemy; (Exod. xxiii. 4, 5;) and the absolute rest of the Sabbath was to be given to every animal that was employed in labour. (Exod. xx. 10; xxiii. 12.) Such is the care of God for even the irrational animals,—a care which men are bound devoutly to observe, and conscientiously to imitate.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD WITH RESPECT TO INDIVIDUALS OF MANKIND.

If Almighty God is pleased to extend His providential regard to inanimate nature and to brute creatures, much more does He extend it to the human race, who were originally formed in His own image, are redeemed by the blood of His incarnate Son, and are destined to an immortal existence. On this subject the testimony of the sacred writers is most explicit, and is repeated in almost every page of the Bible.

His care for mankind, individually considered, begins before they are born ; as David gratefully acknowledges to have been the case with respect to himself. Addressing his Maker, he says, " My substance was not hid from Thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect ; and in Thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." (Psalm cxxxix. 15, 16.) The facts which are here delicately expressed in enigmatical language had been previously confessed by the patriarch Job, who for a time wondered how it was that God, who had so kindly formed him, should afflict him with such severity. (Job xxxi. 15.) With respect to her son

Samuel, Hannah also said, "For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition." (1 Sam. i. 27.)

The Holy Scriptures no less explicitly acknowledge the hand of God in the births of children than in their secret formation. "Thou art He," says the psalmist, "that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall be continually of Thee." (Psalm lxi. 6.)

The uninterrupted preservation of the relative numbers of the sexes can be justly ascribed to nothing but the superintending providence of God. Provision is thus made in every land, in every age, under every form of government, and in every state of society, for the maintenance of that original law of the great Creator, that "every man" should "have his own wife, and every woman have her own husband." (Gen. i. 27; Matt. xix. 4; 1 Cor. vii. 2.) Such is the law of God, with respect to mankind; and such is the provision which He makes in perpetuity for the practical observance of it. Concubinage and capricious divorce are violations of this law, and as such are condemned by God's word, and rebuked by the arrangements of His providence. "From the beginning it was not so." It is not by any human determination, but solely by the will of God, that a mother gives birth to a son or a daughter, as the case may be.

The providence of God is seen in all its tenderness and condescension in the case of infants. A new-born child is destitute of intelligence, of experience, and of all ability to provide for its own wants, or to ward off the dangers to which it is exposed; and must therefore immediately perish, but for the means which are providentially supplied for its preservation. Parental affec-

tion renders the father and mother more concerned for the welfare of the helpless stranger than they are for their own ; and the mother's breasts furnish the aliment which, above all others, is the best adapted to the child's nourishment and growth. It has, indeed, no teeth for the mastication of food. The truth is, that it wants none ; but the roots of them already exist ; and the teeth will appear as soon as they are needed. Now here is proof not only of wise and benevolent arrangement, but of forethought ; and these altogether independent both of the parents and their child : and to whom can they be ascribed, but to God, whose wisdom and goodness are unfathomable, and never end ? He it is that creates the yearnings of parental affection for the special benefit of the infant heir of immortality ; and the man who cannot see in all these arrangements the hand of God is worse than blind.

God's care of little children is not only matter of just inference, but is confirmed by Scripture facts. Pharaoh commanded that all the male children of the Hebrews should be murdered as soon as they were born ; but the providence of God limited the execution of the cruel mandate. Not a few of the infants thus appointed to die were preserved, and among them Moses, over whom the Almighty watched with a care more tender than even that of his anxious mother. (Exod. i. 16, 17; ii. 3-10.) His concern for young children is strongly expressed in the reason which He assigned for His forbearance towards the Ninevites, when they appeared as penitent suppliants at His feet. "Should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right

hand and their left hand?" (Jonah iv. 11;) evidently meaning children of tender age. Encouraging evidence of the same fact we have in the conduct of our blessed Lord, who was "much displeased" when His disciples attempted to hinder the people from bringing their "little children" to Him; and manifested His love to them by taking them up into His arms and blessing them. (Mark x. 13-16.) His blessing is no mere formality, nor a mere expression of goodwill, but the communication of a substantial benefit; for His word is a word of power.

Considering the thoughtlessness of children, their inexperience, their vivacity, and their recklessness in play, we cannot but deem it matter of surprise that so few of them receive any permanent injury. The preservation of their lives and limbs cannot be ascribed to caution on their part, but to the kind and watchful care of Divine providence, of which good angels in many cases are doubtless the instruments.

The peculiarities of the human nature, by which mankind are elevated above the brute creation, are all to be ascribed to the will and goodness of God. "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding." (Job xxxii. 8.) He "formeth the spirit of man within him." (Zech. xii. 1.) He "teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven." (Job xxxv. 11.) The bodily senses and the mental faculties are alike His gift. He "planted the ear," and "formed the eye." (Psalm xciv. 9.) "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them." (Prov. xx. 12.) When Moses pleaded that he was

"not eloquent," but "slow of speech, and of a slow tongue," as a reason why he should not go to the Egyptian court, to demand the liberation of the Hebrew tribes ; "the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?" (Exod. iv. 11.)

It is not, then, by chance, but by providential design, that some children possess their mental faculties and bodily senses in their perfection, while others are of feeble intellect, slow of apprehension, or want their sight or hearing ; and in both cases God has just and benevolent ends in view, which will appear in due time. In the meanwhile, gratitude for every benefit, and submission under every privation, are duties of universal obligation. To the disciples, who thought that natural blindness was the punishment of sin, either committed by the sufferer in a pre-existent state, or by his parents, our Saviour said, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents : but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." (John ix. 3.) The purpose of God in the blindness of this man was, that Jesus might work a miracle of healing upon him. The miracle, it would appear, led to the man's conversion, and consequent salvation ; and probably to the same results in other persons then living, who became in their turn witnesses of Christ's power and mercy. The man's blindness, therefore, which in itself was a sad calamity, proved in the issue a mighty blessing. God is especially mindful of those who suffer from any personal defect, and will punish with terrible severity those who are so inhuman as to injure them, or treat them with ridicule. "Thou

shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God," (Lev. xix. 14,) who has Himself withheld from them the blessings of hearing and sight, and who therefore extends to them a most tender and compassionate regard. Every wrong that is inflicted upon them He will righteously avenge.

The bodily wants of men are all supplied by God. Food is His gift; and it is not produced in large quantities beforehand, so that the vast human family may say they have ample supplies for many years. It is rather furnished as it is needed, from year to year; in order that mankind may never forget their dependence upon Him that made them, and to whom they are indebted for "life, and breath, and all things." (Acts xvii. 25.) A deficient harvest is a great calamity, and a succession of such would soon be fatal to health and life. But God is not wont thus to deal with His helpless creatures, sinful as they are, "because He delighteth in mercy." (Micah vii. 18.)

When the patriarch Jacob was dying, at the advanced age of one hundred and forty-seven years, he gratefully confessed that God, the God of his fathers, had "fed him all his life long unto that day." (Gen. xlvi. 15.) When Naomi, who had with her husband left her home in a time of famine, "heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread," she returned to her native land, that she might partake of the general benefit. (Ruth i. 6.) Aware that it is God that "giveth food to all flesh," (Psalm cxxxvi. 25,) Agur offered to Him the memorable prayer, "Feed me with food convenient for me." (Prov. xxx. 8.)

On this subject the teaching of our Lord is equally explicit and encouraging. He declares that God feeds the ravens, and will therefore feed His human offspring, who in His estimation are "much better than the fowls." (Luke xii. 24.) He has also taught us, when we pray, to say, "Give us this day our daily bread :" (Matt. vi. 11:) thus reminding us of our continual dependence upon the Divine bounty ; and that our desires for temporal good ought to be moderate. A daily supply meets the necessity of our case ; and with this we should not only be content, but grateful. In accordance with these principles, He has also instructed us by His example devoutly to acknowledge the goodness of our heavenly Father when He spreads a table before us. "He took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to His disciples, and the disciples to the multitude." (Matt. xv. 36.) When He instituted the holy supper, also, "He took the cup, and gave thanks ;" "and He took bread, and gave thanks." (Luke xxii. 17, 19.)

Yet, great and abounding as is the goodness of God, we have no right to expect that He will supply our daily wants, if we willingly neglect the means which He has appointed in order to this end. He will not reverse the original sentence, "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread." Nothing can be more alien from the spirit of Christianity, than indolence, sloth, and a craving mendicity, which seeks to live upon the labours of other men. St. Paul, who knew the mind of the Lord, thus addressed the members of the Thessalonian church, and through them the followers of Christ to the end of the world : "This we commanded you, that if

any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread :” (2 Thess. iii. 10–12 :) evidently meaning the bread which they have earned by their own industry. The idle persons here referred to appear to have desired to live upon the church’s funds : but this the apostle forbade ; intimating that the charitable funds of the church are intended to relieve the aged and the sick, who are not able to provide for themselves, and not to support men who are able to work. “ Ye shall serve the Lord your God, and He shall bless thy bread and thy water.” (Exod. xxiii. 25.) When our Saviour says, “ Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life,” (John vi. 27,) He does not contradict the apostolic admonition just quoted ; but simply expresses Himself in a well-known idiom of the Hebrew language, in which one thing is strongly recommended in preference to another. His meaning obviously is, “ Labour not mainly, and much less exclusively, for temporal food, but for that which will nourish you to the life eternal.” In other words, “ Be more anxious for the salvation of your souls, than for the supply of your bodily wants.”

In nothing is the goodness of God, in the arrangements of His providence, more signally manifested, than in the food with which He supplies mankind. Its variety, its abundance, its nutritious qualities, the gratification which it affords, with the fact, that the countless millions who enjoy it from age to age are sinners

in His sight, all demonstrate the tenderness of His mercy, and the freeness of His love. "He bringeth forth food out of the earth ; and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart." (Psalm civ. 14, 15.)

Next to daily supplies of food mankind stand in absolute need of clothing, both for moral purposes, and for the preservation of health and life; and this great benefit is also supplied by the hand of God. Addressing His disciples, in the presence of a vast concourse of people, as He sat upon a mountain, our Saviour said, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?...Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things," (Matt. vi. 28-32,) and will provide for the necessity. Human clothing varies in different countries, according to climate, and the capricious dictates of fashion; but in every instance the materials of which it is made are supplied by the providence of God, who makes both animal and vegetable substances available to this end. The fleece, the thread of the silkworm, the skins of beasts, the fur of the beaver, flax, cotton, and even straw, are all laid under contribution both for use and ornament: and without these things, and others of a like kind, which God in the plenitude of His goodness supplies as they are wanted, mankind, as to their physical condition, would be the most wretched objects

either in the earth, the air, or the sea. But who can describe the manner in which clothing, as well as food, is provided? In its production it surpasses all human power and skill, and is exclusively the work of God.

When Jacob left his father's house, a solitary and friendless wanderer, without property, and without a home, he deeply felt his dependence upon God. Having slept in the open air, and had a vision which assured him of the Divine care, "Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee." (Gen. xxviii. 20-22.) He who supplied Jacob with "raiment," according to his request, was equally attentive to the safety and comfort of the tribes of Israel during their long abode in the wilderness; and hence His address to them when they came to the end of their wanderings, and were just about to enter into the promised land: "I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot." (Deut. xxix. 5.) If it should be said that God's treatment of the tribes in the wilderness was of a strictly miraculous character, and is therefore no example of His ordinary dealings with mankind; we answer, that in all cases, and especially in the case of the poor, clothing, as well as food, is declared to be His gift. "He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and

raiment." (Deut. x. 18.) "The lambs are for thy clothing." (Prov. xxvii. 26.) The difference between a miracle and an ordinary interposition of Divine providence is in the mode of operation. One accords with a recognised rule, or law; the other is a deviation from it; but in both cases the agency of God is directly concerned.

The benevolent care of Divine providence is eminently seen in the case of emigrants removing from one region of the earth to another. Of Noah's posterity, who were wishful to remain in the same locality, it is said, "The Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth." (Gen. xi. 8.) He guided Abraham in his wanderings, when the patriarch left the place of his birth, and "went out, not knowing whither he went." (Heb. xi. 8.) And still, for the relief of an overcrowded population, He discovers to them unoccupied lands, "and there He maketh the hungry to dwell, that they may prepare a city for habitation; and sow the fields, and plant vineyards, which may yield fruits of increase. He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly; and suffereth not their cattle to decrease.....He setteth the poor on high from affliction, and maketh him families like a flock." (Psalm cvii. 36-38, 41.) In many thousand families, formerly belonging to the British islands, and now residing in countries once savage, barbarous, and uncultivated, these declarations are happily verified. On their arrival in these remote settlements, they found that the land

"Was all before them where to choose  
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide."

Some of the most beneficial arrangements of Provi-

dence escape general observation, and command no gratitude, because they are common. This is true with respect to the varieties which exist among mankind. They seem all to be cast in one mould, having the same shape and general characteristics ; yet no two persons are exactly alike either in body or mind. If the features, voices, and conformation of all were to present no variety, husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, could not recognise each other in a crowd ; and what misery and confusion would then ensue ! In such a state of things criminals would escape detection ; honest men would command no respect, for they could not be distinguished ; and debtors and creditors could not know each other. And why do mankind thus differ, so that cases of mistaken identity so seldom occur ? To this inquiry atheism can furnish no reply : and the only rational answer that can be given to it is, that such is the will of the Almighty, who is mindful of the convenience and well-being of His human offspring.

No less manifest are the wisdom and goodness of God in the varieties of mental character, and of taste and inclination, which are observable among mankind, and even in the same families. If men were all intent upon one particular occupation, and would be satisfied with nothing else, society could not exist, and the world would be one wide scene of misery. Suppose everyone were bent on the cultivation of the soil, and no one would learn to build and furnish houses, to fabricate clothing, to navigate the sea, to study the principles of government and law, or the science of medicine, how miserable must be the state of the world ! The fact,

that children born of the same parents, and placed from early life in the same circumstances, prefer modes of life wide asunder as the poles, can only be rationally accounted for on the principle for which we plead,—the superintending providence of God, who is concerned for the welfare of the entire human family, and therefore provides for the necessities of all.

The truth is, that even arts which are strictly ornamental are in Holy Scripture ascribed to God. The priestly garments of Aaron, intended “for glory and beauty,” were to be made by men whom He qualified for the task. The direction which He therefore gave to Moses was, “Thou shalt speak unto all the wise hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron’s garments to consecrate him, that he may minister unto Me in the priest’s office.” (Exod. xxviii. 3.) A similar direction was given with regard to the ornaments of the tabernacle. “The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, See, I have called by name Bezaleel: .....and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship. And I, behold, I have given with him Aholiab :.....and in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee.” (Exod. xxxi. 1-6.) Moses, who received these instructions from God, has given an account of the productions of these ingenious men in a subsequent part of his narrative. (Exod. xxxvi. 1-4; xxxvii. 1, &c.) The taber-

nacle was rich in its ornaments because it was the sanctuary of God; the place where He chose to manifest His presence and glory, and where He received the homage of His worshippers; and because it was also a type of the spotless humanity of Christ. A man "filled with wisdom and understanding," and therefore resembling Bezaleel, was employed by Solomon in preparing the ornamental furniture of the temple. (1 Kings vii. 13, 14.)

Now, if an aptitude for the production of things which are simply ornamental is the gift of God, and ought as such to be acknowledged, much more are we bound to confess His hand in things of the greatest utility. Many of these are called "inventions," as if they were nothing more than the result of human ingenuity and research; when they ought rather to be regarded as "discoveries," made to men by the good providence of God; for such they are, being many of them casually made, when the parties concerned were thinking of something else. Among things of this kind may be justly ranked the art of printing and of engraving; the mariner's compass;\* the electric telegraph; the application of steam to manufactures, navigation, travelling, and the transit of goods; improvements in chemistry, and their application not only to medical purposes but to endless purposes of utility and ornament; the manufacture of glass, and of clocks and watches; and a thousand things besides, from which benefits are daily and hourly received. "Every good gift is from above." We admire a well-cultivated farm, and praise its owner as a man of intelligence and enterprise. The

\* See note E, in the Appendix.

truth is, “his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him,” whether he knows it or not: for “this also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.” (Isaiah xxviii. 26, 29.)

It is the will of Almighty God, that mankind in general should devote their lives to some useful employment, for their own benefit, and the benefit of others; but what that employment shall be in particular cases is often a matter of considerable difficulty. Many a man has chosen a profession, or a kind of business, to which his temper, intellect, and habits were ill adapted; and the consequence has been that he was both unsuccessful and unhappy. The reason of his misfortunes is, that a sound discretion was not exercised by those who had the direction of him in early life; and that the guidance of Divine providence was neither desired nor sought. Of the parties concerned it may be said, that God was not in all their thoughts. And yet “who knoweth what is good for man in this life?” (Eccles. vi. 12.) “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” (Jer. x. 23.) No man, however, is abandoned to his own ignorance and folly, but as the punishment of his ungodliness and sin. “If any man lack wisdom,” even with respect to the affairs of this life, he is directed to “ask of God,” and “it shall be given him.” (James i. 5.) He has given an assurance, that if in all our ways we acknowledge Him, He will direct our paths. (Prov. iii. 6.) The psalmist, when far advanced in years, exclaimed with grateful joy, “O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth.” (Psalm lxxi. 17.) This

is a subject that addresses itself directly to the hearts of young persons, just rising into the activities of life; and to them, as well as to political bodies, the appeal may be emphatically made, "Wilt thou not from this time cry unto Me, My Father, Thou art the Guide of my youth?" (Jer. iii. 4.)

This devout acknowledgment of God is the more becoming and necessary, because success in all our plans and undertakings depends entirely upon His will. He can frustrate the wisest schemes, and baffle the efforts of the mightiest. "For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. For God is the Judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another." (Psalm lxxv. 6, 7.) "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill." (Eccles. ix. 11.) "Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth." (Deut. viii. 18.) St. Paul directed the members of the Corinthian church to present their charitable donations on the first day of every week, "as God had prospered them:" (1 Cor. xvi. 2:) thus practically and habitually acknowledging His blessing upon them, upon their property, and upon their honest labour.

One of the most important events in the life of mankind individually is their entrance into the marriage relation, in which the providence of God is especially concerned. Marriage is His own ordinance, instituted with a direct reference to human happiness, to the perpetuity of the race, and the right training of children. God saw that it was not good that man should be

alone, and therefore created woman as “an help meet for him.” (Gen. ii. 18.) When this relation is formed with due consideration of the temper, the rank, and the age of the parties; in the fear of God, and with sincere prayer for His guidance; it is invariably attended by His blessing, whether the union is prolonged through many years, or is speedily dissolved by death. “A prudent wife is from the Lord.” (Prov. xix. 14.) “Her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.” (Prov. xxxi. 10–12.)

Children, and especially the children of godly parents, are spoken of in Holy Scripture as gifts from God; and, as such, they should be thankfully received, and from their infancy be devoted to Him. “Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord.” “As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man, so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them.” (Psalm cxxvii. 3–5.) When Esau met his brother after an absence of several years, he said, “Who are those with thee?” And Jacob answered, “The children which God hath graciously given thy servant.” (Gen. xxxiii. 5.) Joseph cherished the same views and feelings; for when Israel in his last hours beheld Joseph’s sons, he inquired, “Who are these? and Joseph said unto his father, They are my sons, whom God hath given me in this place.” (Gen. xlvi. 8, 9.)

Yet it is only for a short period that individuals and families enjoy without interruption, unmixed with pain and sorrow, the blessings of a bountiful Providence. Sickness and pain succeed to health and ease; “riches make themselves wings,” and “fly away as an eagle

toward heaven ;" (Prov. xxiii. 5;) children sicken and die; the tender ties of domestic life are severed one by one; and age, with its infirmities, follows the vivacity of youth and the strength of manhood. Yet these events, though expected as matters of course, are not the effects of a blind chance, but of providential arrangement; and the parties who are thus visited are not less the objects of God's fatherly care than they were in the times of their greatest earthly enjoyment, when the candle of the Lord shone upon them in all its brightness. When Job was suddenly reduced from affluence to poverty, and bereft of all his children, he confessed the hand of God in the painful visitation, and meekly said, " Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job i. 21.) When, in addition to these calamities, he was smitten with a sore disease, "from the sole of his foot unto his crown;" and was tempted to " curse God and die;" he replied, " What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job ii. 10.) When David's child was sick, he fasted and prayed in the hope of its recovery; but when it was dead, he went "into the house of the Lord, and worshipped" in devout submission to the Almighty's will. (2 Sam. xii. 16-28.) On another occasion, when a breach was also made in his family, confessing the hand of God in his trouble, he said, " Lover and friend hast Thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness." (Psalm lxxxviii. 18.) In all such cases the language of the psalmist is expressive of the temper

which every good man ought to cherish : “ I was dumb, I opened not my mouth ; because Thou didst it.” (Psalm xxxix. 9.) If death should even take place as a mark of God’s displeasure, every murmuring thought should be repressed. When Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, “ offered strange fire before the Lord,” in opposition to His command, “ there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.” “ Aaron held his peace ;” for he felt that the judgment was righteously inflicted. (Lev. x. 1-3.)

In all cases of suffering, whether personal or domestic, the hand of God is concerned. “ Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.” “ Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth : therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty : for He maketh sore, and bindeth up : He woundeth, and His hands make whole.” (Job v. 6, 17, 18.) In all times of sorrow and affliction, therefore, prayer to God is an appropriate duty : prayer for recovery, if such be the Almighty’s will ; prayer that the means which are used in order to a recovery may be successful ; prayer for patience, and supporting grace ; prayer for spiritual improvement under the chastening hand of God ; prayer for a happy issue, let it be what it may. “ Is any among you afflicted ? let him pray ;” (James v. 13;) for “ unto God the Lord belong the issues from death.” (Psalm lxviii. 20.)

Good men have always acknowledged the merciful interposition of God in their recovery from sickness. On the occasion of his restored health Hezekiah thus poured forth the feelings of a thankful heart : “ I had great bitterness : but Thou hast in love to my soul deli-

vered it from the pit of corruption : for Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back....The living, the living, he shall praise Thee, as I do this day : the father to the children shall make known Thy truth. The Lord was ready to save me : therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord." (Isai. xxxviii. 17-20.)

No less grateful was St. Paul for the recovered health of his friend and fellow-labourer Epaphroditus ; of whom he says, when writing to the Philippians, "Indeed he was sick nigh unto death : but God had mercy on him ; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow." (Phil. ii. 27.) The recovery of a devoted and gifted minister from the gates of death is indeed an occasion of thanksgiving to God ; and even men less distinguished, when raised from the bed of sickness, ought gratefully to confess, "The Lord hath chastened me sore : but He hath not given me over unto death." (Psalm cxviii. 18.)

But whether men recover from sickness, or enjoy through a long life a state of uninterrupted health, they are indebted to the goodness of God for their preservation from day to day. The truth is, that our dependence upon God is constant and absolute. We not only depend upon Him for the continuance of our lives, but for the possession of all our mental faculties and bodily powers. He could in a moment extinguish the brightest intellect, reduce the wisest man to a state of dotage, and render the man of gigantic strength as helpless as a child. For what is the strongest man in the hand of Omnipotence ? "A worm, a leaf, a blast, a shade."

To this effect Joshua expressed himself in one of his

last addresses to the armies of Israel: "And now, behold, the Lord hath kept me alive, as He said, these forty and five years, even since the Lord spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness: and now, lo, I am this day four score and five years old." (Joshua xiv. 10.) On this subject, the preservation of human life by God, the testimony of Scripture is strong and explicit. "O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of His praise to be heard: which holdeth our soul in life." (Psalm lxvi. 8, 9.) "For in Him we live, and move, and have our being." (Acts xvii. 28.) Hence it is that all human purposes and plans, with respect to the future, should be made with a just reserve. "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." (James iv. 13-15.) To all the men who thus live in criminal forgetfulness of their dependence upon God, and of the uncertainty of life, the words of Daniel, addressed to king Belshazzar, are fearfully applicable: "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified?" "In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain." (Dan. v. 23, 30.)

To all orders and degrees of men are extended the guardianship and bounty of Divine providence; but especially to the abject classes, who possess no adequate means of self-defence; such as the poor, the friendless,

the oppressed, the stranger, the captive, the widow, the fatherless. All acts of injustice towards any of them God will not fail to resent and punish; and all acts of kindness to them, rendered for His sake, He will approve and reward. The cry of oppression, uttered by the tribes of Israel in Egypt, entered into His ear, and brought Him down to their relief; and He took summary vengeance upon their hard-hearted oppressors. "The children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning. ...And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them." (Exod. ii. 23-25.) A terrible reckoning awaits those who steal, buy, and sell human beings, and enrich themselves by the unrequited labour of men, women, and children, degrading them to a level with brute creatures.

For wise and righteous purposes, often unknown to us, God is pleased, at least for a season, to withhold many temporal blessings from the poor; yet a thousand promises assure them of His compassionate regard for them; and He has charged those to whom He has confided the good things of this life to treat them with kindness and liberality, as ever they would themselves appear before Him with acceptance when summoned to His bar. "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need." "Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved

when thou givest unto him : because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto." "Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land." (Deut. xv. 7, 8, 10, 11.)

Widows and fatherless children are often mentioned in Holy Scripture as objects of God's kindest remembrance. "Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in anywise, and they cry at all unto Me, I will surely hear their cry ; and My wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword ; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless." (Exod. xxii. 22-24.) "Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen." (Deut. xxvii. 19.) "A Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widows, is God in His holy habitation." (Psalm lxviii. 5.)

God's compassion for strangers is often declared in the Mosaic law, which charges the Hebrew people to treat with lenity the heathen men and their families who might seek an asylum in the holy land. They were to be allowed freely to enjoy the rich productions of the country, and to share in the religious advantages of God's chosen people. Beautiful examples of God's interposition in behalf of strangers we have in the case of Joseph in Egypt, and of Daniel and his pious comrades when they were taken captives to Babylon. "The Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison," where he was confined under a false charge; (Gen. xxxix. 21;) and the four Hebrews, in the court of heathen Babylon, obtained similar favour, by the

good hand of God, from the man to whom the charge of them was committed in the land of their exile. (Dan. i. 9, 14, 17.)

When men are far advanced in years, their senses are often blunted, and their means of enjoyment diminished. Their sight is dim, their hearing impaired, their early friendships are dissolved, and they find themselves surrounded by a new generation, with whom they have not the tender sympathies by which they were formerly actuated. In these circumstances they are in danger of becoming querulous and discontented. But God is mindful of them, supplies them with many means of encouragement, and requires for them an appropriate respect. His charge respecting them is, "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God;" (Lev. xix. 32;) and His promise to them is, "Even to your old age I am He; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you." (Isai. xlvi. 4.) These words of kindness and of tender mercy, originally addressed to the "house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel," are equally applicable to all the aged servants of God, and fully authorize them to expect a gracious answer to the psalmist's prayer: "Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth." "When I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not." (Psalm lxxi. 9, 18.)

We are apt to consider the moral precepts of the Decalogue simply as a declaration of God's love of righteousness, and as enjoining upon mankind a conduct which in itself is strictly just. But this is only a partial view of

the subject. Those precepts are also an expression of the Divine benevolence, being intended to secure the welfare of all mankind, by guarding their persons and property, and by securing to them the rights with which their Maker has invested them. The seventh command, which forbids adultery, guards the rights of married persons; the eighth, which says, "Thou shalt not steal," guards our property; the ninth guards our reputation against the tongue of the slanderer; and the tenth forbids all irregularity of desire with respect to that which is another's. In this view the moral precepts of God are an expression of His essential goodness. They are "a wall of fire" placed by God Himself around the persons, families, and property of mankind; and were they universally practised, they would, to a great extent, turn our world into a paradise. Moral precepts are a declaration of God's providential care of mankind, as well as of His love of righteousness. They declare it to be His will that men should be careful of one another's property, and especially of each other's lives. When a man was found slain in the holy land, the strictest inquiry was to be made for the discovery of the murderer; and when the matter still remained a secret, an animal was to be provided for a sacrifice, the elders of the nearest city were to wash their hands over the victim, and solemnly declare before God and the people that their hands had not shed this blood, neither had their eyes seen it shed. (Deut. xxi. 7.) So tender is God's care of human life!

The truth is, His care extends to all mankind. It attends them in all their concerns, by night and by day, in health and in sickness, in prosperity and adversity, in

infancy, manhood, and old age, and in death itself. Mariners, who live upon a perilous element, have a special interest in His guardian mercy ; for He is “the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea.” (Psalm lxv. 5.) “He commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths : their soul is melted because of trouble. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He bringeth them out of their distresses.” (Psalm cvii. 25-30.)

A safe journey by land is also a mercy from God. When Ezra went from Babylon to Jerusalem, carrying with him a large sum of money for the erection of the temple, and the restoration of its services, he says, “The hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way :” (Ezra viii. 31 :) and when St. Paul contemplated a visit to Rome, he prayed that he “might have a prosperous journey by the will of God ;” (Rom. i. 10;) aware that there is no safety, either by land or by sea, but under His guardian care.

The death of a human being is an event of the most solemn moment, and therefore never takes place but by the appointment or the permission of God. He that is undesignedly slain by another is said to be “delivered” by God into the hands of the man that slew him, but intended him no harm ; (Exodus xxi. 13;) so that what appears to men as strictly accidental is, in fact, a providential arrangement. By the will of God the personal conduct of individuals hastens their death, or is a means of prolonging their lives. “Bloody and

deceitful men shall not live out half their days ; " (Psalm lv. 23;) a righteous providence, as in the case of murderers, of Judas, and of Herod, cutting short their guilty career. "The years of the wicked shall be shortened," (Prov. x. 27,) that the world may be delivered from the curse of their example. On the other hand, "righteousness tendeth to life," (Prov. xi. 19,) and "the fear of the Lord prolongeth days." (Prov. x. 27.)

In respect of the impenitent and unbelieving, death is inflicted as the unmitigated penalty of sin. It terminates their day of grace, separates them for ever from every means of enjoyment, and introduces them into a state of unutterable and endless misery. To sanctified believers death is the gate of the heavenly paradise, within whose sacred enclosure "they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters : and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." (Rev. vii. 16, 17.) The "keys of death," as well as the keys of Hades, the invisible world, are in the hands of Christ, and will always be used for the benefit of them that love Him, (Rev. i. 18,) and in righteous retribution in respect of those who love Him not. In no case is death a matter of chance. The hand of God is in it in mercy or in judgment.

"It matters little at what hour o' the day  
 The righteous falls asleep ; death cannot come  
 To him untimely who is fit to die :  
 The less of this cold world, the more of heaven ;  
 The briefer life, the earlier immortality." \*

\* Milman.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD WITH RESPECT TO THE  
HEBREW NATION.

THAT the providence of God is concerned in the affairs of political bodies, no less than in the affairs of individual men, will be denied by no one who credits the testimony of Holy Scripture, and has paid due attention to the history of the world.

It was the will of God that the posterity of Noah, after the general deluge, should spread themselves over the islands and continents of the earth, so as to bring the whole under cultivation, and to render the brute creatures subservient to their use. The people were unwilling to acquiesce in this design, and resolved rather to remain united in one body, and in the same neighbourhood. They combined therefore to erect a tower, apparently intending it to be a centre of union; and thus to get for themselves "a name," and prevent their being "scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth :" (Gen. xi. 4 :) an object from which it would seem they were greatly averse. But "there is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord." (Prov. xxi. 30.) He interposed, so as to confound their language, and to render them in their speech unintelligible to one another. The consequence was, that, notwithstanding their reluctance, "the Lord scattered

them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth : and they left off to build the city." (Gen. xi. 6-8.) The earth, so far as it was then known, was divided among the posterity of Noah's three sons. Asia was assigned to Shem ; Africa to Ham ; and Europe to Japheth ; without any attempt to define the exact boundaries of these divisions. A remarkable prophecy, delivered by Noah, and describing the fortunes of these three branches of his family, has been in a course of fulfilment for more than four thousand years. (Gen. ix. 25-27.) Canaan, "the servile progeny of Ham," is still doomed to servitude ; Japheth is indeed "enlarged," and "dwells in the tents of Shem" in a mystical as well as in a literal sense ; Europeans mingling largely with Asiatic nations for commercial purposes, and freely participating in the spiritual benefits which are connected with those revelations of Divine truth that were made to Abraham and his posterity, who belonged to the family of Shem.

In whatever locality any number of people might settle, they formed themselves into a political body under the government of a chief, or a king. We read, therefore, that in the time of Abraham, which was less than a hundred years from the death of Noah, there were kings in several places ; the people everywhere feeling the necessity of combining together for their defence against hostile tribes as well as against private wrong. (Gen xiv. 1, 2.)

As time advanced, nation after nation sprang into existence, till at length four great empires arose, which successively gained the dominion of the world ; the Assyrian, the Medo-Persian, the Greek, and the Roman ;

all of which are exactly described by the prophet Daniel. (Dan. ii. 36-43.) Contemporary with these great empires were many minor states and kingdoms; and when the Roman empire, the last of the four, was dissolved, there arose out of it ten different states, symbolized by the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image; (Dan. ii. 41-43;) some of which still remain, after they have undergone various changes in the lapse of ages.

According to the teaching of Holy Scripture, God is pleased to deal with nations in the way of retribution as certainly as He deals with individuals. He holds them responsible for their conduct, inflicting punishment upon them when it is merited by flagrant crimes; and in respect of obedience requiring the most of those nations upon whom He has bestowed the greatest advantages and favours. To the inquisitive Athenians St. Paul said that God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us." (Acts xvii. 26, 27.) From this statement it appears that God "determined" "the times" at which the various nations should appear, and assume their respective forms of government; together with "the bounds" of every territory they should occupy. He gave the land of Canaan by a special grant to the people of Israel; but refused to put them in possession of it till "the iniquity" of the original inhabitants was "full," so that they could be borne with no longer. (Gen. xv. 16.) He "gave unto Esau" and his posterity "Mount Seir,

to possess it ; " (Josh. xxiv. 4;) and so of other communities.

That nations, as such, are held responsible to God for their conduct, is especially manifest from His declaration to Jeremiah : " At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it ; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it ; if it do evil in My sight, that it obey not My voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them." (Jer. xviii. 7-10.) There is, however, this important difference between the retributive dealings of God with individuals and with nations : The rewards of obedience and the punishment of sin, so far as individuals of mankind are concerned, are mostly reserved for a future state ; but nations receive their retribution in this world, because as nations they have no existence in a future state. Nations are judged in time ; individuals will be judged when time shall end.

While God is pleased to hold every man responsible for his own conduct, it is important to observe that He does not deal with all in precisely the same manner. To one man He commits five talents, to another two, and to another one ; charging them all to " occupy " till He shall come to reckon with them. (Matt. xxv. 15.) The man who has received one talent is accountable for that one, and no more ; but more, in the way of improvement, is required of the other two, who have received a greater amount. And so it is with respect

to nations, some of which are more highly favoured than others, especially with respect to religious knowledge, and therefore lie under greater obligations : for “unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.” (Luke xii. 48.) All nations owe allegiance to God, but in various degrees. In this respect England and China, for example, are not upon a level in His sight, although both of them claim the superiority with regard to intelligence.

The nation that was the most highly favoured by God in ancient times, and was therefore placed under the greatest obligations to Him, was that of the Hebrews, with whom He entered into a special covenant. He delivered them from a state of cruel servitude by a series of plagues inflicted upon their oppressors, by which Egypt was all but ruined ; He divided the waters of the Red Sea, to give them a free passage ; He fed them with manna from heaven for the long space of forty years ; He sent them a miraculous supply of water from the smitten rock ; He defended them against every hostile power during their sojourn in the wilderness ; He divided for them the wide stream of the Jordan ; by a series of miracles He put them in possession of a land of unexampled fruitfulness ; and He gave them His law in a manner which produced a universal terror, and caused even Moses to say, “ I exceedingly fear and quake.” He gave them a written revelation of His will ; a form of religious worship, typical in its character, and full of spiritual and moral instruction ; He dwelt in the midst of them, so as constantly to display among them His power and goodness ; and among them He was pleased from time to time to raise up inspired prophets, who came to them with messages of

reproof, of warning, and of promise, as the occasions required.

The people thus guarded and blessed the Almighty separated from all other nations, that they might be preserved from the defilement of heathenism, and remain through a series of dark ages as His "witnesses" in the world; (Isai. xliii. 10;) and in their national capacity He blessed or punished them according to their general conduct. They had periods of reformation and prosperity; but their history, as a whole, is a sad record of crime and of consequent misery. Many of their institutions bore a miraculous character, and God's treatment of them was in many respects peculiar. It was their privilege, with regard to duty and reward, to walk by sight, as well as by faith; for they had among them sensible tokens of God's presence and operation. When a Hebrew husband suspected his wife of infidelity to him, God Himself engaged directly to interpose so as to establish the innocence or the guilt of the suspected party, as the case might be. (Num. v. 11-28.) When all the men of Israel left their homes, to attend the great annual festivals in Jerusalem, which they were required to do three times every year, He promised to guard their families and property from the hands of the neighbouring heathen; (Exod. xxxiv. 24;) and every seventh year He pledged Himself that the land should produce a treble crop; so that the people should have plenty of food during the year in which their fields remained fallow, no seed was sown, and no harvest gathered in. (Lev. xxv. 20, 21.)

Notwithstanding these peculiarities, and others of a similar kind, their history is full of instruction. Their

annals pour a flood of light upon the providence of God, and embody principles which ought to regulate the conduct of all nations till the end of the world. We will take a brief survey of the sins with which they are charged, and of the punishments which thence ensued ; and will show that those punishments are not to be regarded only as the natural consequences of sin, according to an established course of nature, but as directly inflicted by the hand of God Himself; their national blessings also being His gifts, the declared tokens of His favour.

It was their privilege to be a great and mighty nation, surpassing in wealth and power all the nations of the earth ; but, in consequence of their perverseness and folly, they fell immensely short of their high calling. During the forty years of their wanderings in the wilderness, their wants were supplied by miracle; but they were then unsettled, suffering the penalty of their unbelief. In the time of the Judges they were almost incessantly harassed by the original inhabitants, large numbers of whom still remained in the land, and committed fearful depredations upon the Hebrew tribes. Their condition was but little improved under the disastrous reign of Saul ; and after David ascended the throne, the people for several years yielded only a divided allegiance, many of them adhering to the family of the deceased king. The nation afterwards rose to a high state of wealth and power, when all the people submitted to David as the Lord's anointed, and he subdued the original inhabitants of the country, and put his subjects in more extensive possession of the land that God had given them. But the splendour of

David's reign was tarnished by the rebellion of Absalom, which was permitted as the punishment of his father's sin. Yet his military achievements prepared the way for the peace and grandeur of Solomon's time, when the temple was erected, and provision was made for the practice of the Mosaic ceremonial in its complete form, and the nation rose to its greatest elevation of riches and honour. "All king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; none were of silver: it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon. For the king had at sea a navy of Tharshish with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tharshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks. So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom." (1 Kings x. 21-23.) But what is man? The Hebrew king thus distinguished became a sensualist, an idolater, and a curse to the nation, which, in consequence of his misconduct, speedily sunk into a state of irrecoverable decay.

"Of the Jews," says Hooker, "did not even their most malicious and mortal adversaries all acknowledge that to strive against them it was in vain, as long as their amity with God continued? that nothing could weaken them but apostasy? In the whole course of their own proceedings, did they ever find it otherwise; but that during their faith and fidelity towards God every man of them was in war as a thousand strong; and as much as a grand senate for counsel in peaceable deliberations: contrariwise, that if they swerved, as they often did, their wonted courage and magnanimity forsook them utterly; their soldiers and military men

trembled at the sight of the naked sword ; when they entered into mutual conference, and sate in counsel for their own good, that which children might have seen, their gravest senators could not discern ; their prophets saw darkness instead of visions ; the wise and prudent were as men bewitched ; even that which they knew, (being such as might stand them in stead,) they had not the grace to utter ; or if anything were well proposed, it took no place ; it entered not into the minds of the rest to approve and follow it ; but as men confounded with strange and unusual amazements of spirit, they attempted tumultuously they saw not what ; and by the issue of all tempts, they found no certain conclusion but this, ‘God and heaven are strong against us in all we do.’ The cause whereof was secret fear, which took heart and courage from them ; and the cause of their fear an inward guiltiness, that they all had offered God such apparent wrongs as were not pardonable.” \*

Their besetting sin was idolatry, of which they were never effectually cured till the time of the Babylonian captivity, which began about six hundred years before the coming of our Saviour. Sometimes they made for themselves idols, representing, as they supposed, the God of their fathers, in direct opposition to His express command. (Exod. xx. 4, 5 ; xxxii. 4.) At other times they adopted the gods of the heathen. (1 Kings xi. 5, 7 ; xii. 28 ; Jer. xix. 4.) Their idolatry was often connected with abominations of the foulest kind, such as the murder of infants, and the most disgusting sensuality. (Ezek. xvi. 20, 21 ; xxiii. 37 ; Psalm civi.

\* Hooker’s Works, vol. ii., p. 575. Edit. 1836.

87, 88; 2 Chron. xxi. 11.) Their idolatry was the more inexcusable, because their own sacred books presented the most sublime and impressive views of the Divine perfections and character; and their history contained an authentic record of His "mighty acts," which demonstrated His omnipotence and supremacy.

Among their other national sins we may specify the following:—

Profane swearing. "Because of swearing the land mourneth." (Jer. xxiii. 10.)

The violation of the marriage vow. "The land is full of adulterers." (Jer. xxiii. 10.) "A wicked and adulterous generation." (Matt. xvi. 4.)

The neglect of Divine worship. "Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from Mine ordinances, and have not kept them." (Mal. iii. 7.)

The oppression of the poor and defenceless. "The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. And I sought for a man among them that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none." (Ezek. xxii. 29, 30.)

The profanation of the sabbath-day. "Thou hast despised My holy things, and hast profaned My sabbaths." (Ezek. xxii. 8.) "My sabbaths they greatly polluted." (Ezek. xx. 13.)

Injustice and fraud in commercial transactions. "Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable? Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and

with the bag of deceitful weights? For the rich men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth." (Micah vi. 10-12.)

Formality and hypocrisy in the worship of God. "The Lord said, This people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men." (Isai. xxix. 13.) "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me." (Matt. xv. 7, 8.)

Ungodliness and profligacy among all classes, so that the true worshippers of God were generally few and inconsiderable. "Thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return. Therefore I said, Surely these are poor; they are foolish: for they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God. I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the Lord, and the judgment of their God: but these have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds." (Jer. v. 3-5.) "Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them." (Isai. i. 23.) "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and My people love to have it so." (Jer. v. 31.)

The persecution of God's prophets, and the rejection

of His truth as it was delivered by them. "They were disobedient, and rebelled against Thee, and cast Thy law behind their backs, and slew Thy prophets which testified against them." (Neh. ix. 26.) "I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar." "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killst the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. xxiii. 34-37.) "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers." (Acts vii. 52.)

The men who view the affairs of the world simply in the light of philosophy ascribe the prosperity and decay of nations to causes which are merely natural, and to the operation of what they call general laws. They observe that when a people are active, intelligent, thrifty, and are truthful and upright in their dealings with each other, the various branches of industry flourish, and both national wealth and an increased population are the consequence; but when the people abandon themselves to sloth, to gaming, to a lavish expenditure, to luxury and amusements, the public credit declines, and states are speedily reduced in wealth

and power, so as to become an easy prey to any enemy that chooses to make war upon them ; especially when the people are alienated in confidence and affection from their rulers. There is truth in these remarks ; but they do not contain the whole truth, at least so far as the Hebrew people are concerned. All the calamities endured by them, from the time of their emancipation from Egyptian bondage, until the final dissolution of their commonwealth by the Romans, are spoken of in Scripture, not simply as the natural consequence of their vices, but as punishments inflicted upon them by the hand of God, whose authority they disregarded, and whose laws they openly transgressed.

The principal calamities they endured were famine, pestilence, internal discord, invasion, and captivity, all of which the sacred writers ascribe to the providence of God, who thus declares His purpose with respect to His guilty people :—“I will increase the famine upon you, and will break your staff of bread : so will I send upon you famine and evil beasts, and they shall bereave thee ; and pestilence and blood shall pass through thee ; and I will bring the sword upon thee.” (Ezek. v. 16, 17.) “I send My four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast.” (Ezek. xiv. 21.) “Thus saith the Lord God ; As I live, surely they that are in the wastes shall fall by the sword, and him that is in the open field will I give to the beasts to be devoured, and they that be in the forts and in the caves shall die of the pestilence.” (Ezek. xxxiii. 27.) “I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places.” “I have

withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest." "I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your fig-trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them." "I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses." "I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a brand plucked out of the burning." (Amos iv. 6-11.) "Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of Mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands." (Haggai i. 9-11.)

These judgments of God, explicitly declared to be such, had a double object. They were intended to punish the sin which had been already committed, and to give warning as to the consequences of future transgression; so that the guilty parties might repent, and that in future all might be careful not to offend. "When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." (Isai. xxvi. 9.)

In accordance with previous warnings, the Hebrew people were at various times punished with a scarcity of food. "When the Judges ruled, there was a famine in the land." (Ruth i. 1.) "There was a famine in the

days of David three years, year after year." (2 Sam. xxi. 1.) "And there was a sore famine in Samaria" in the time of Ahab and of Elijah. (1 Kings xviii. 2.) "And there was a great famine in Samaria" during the reign of Jehoram the son of Ahab, when the city was besieged. (2 Kings vi. 25.) At a subsequent period Elisha, addressing "the woman, whose son he had restored to life," said, "Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the Lord hath called for a famine; and it shall come upon the land seven years." (2 Kings viii. 1.) Jerusalem "was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. And on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night." (2 Kings xxv. 2-4.) Under these terrible visitations God remembered His faithful servants in mercy, and not only "kept them alive in famine," (Psalm xxxiii. 19,) but enabled them in the midst of His desolating judgments to express a cheerful confidence in Him; a fine example of which we have in the well-known anthem: "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." (Hab. iii. 17, 18.)

No less safe and happy were the spiritual Israel of God when thousands fell by pestilential diseases. It was no uncommon thing with Him at such times to exempt these objects of His special favour from the general calamity. When the destroying angel went

through the land of Egypt, slaying in one night the firstborn of every family, the people of Israel were preserved by means of the blood of the paschal offering sprinkled upon the door-posts of their houses. In one of his visions the prophet Ezekiel saw "a man with a writer's ink-horn," setting "a mark" upon the men in Jerusalem, that "sighed and cried for all the abominations that were done in the midst thereof," as those who were to be preserved in the general slaughter. (Ezek. ix. 3-6.) And in one of the apocalyptic visions St. John "saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads." (Rev. vii. 2, 3.) Promises to this effect were given to the faithful servants of God in these times of public danger and suffering. "He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust." "Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that fieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked." (Psalm xcii. 3-8.) Hence it would appear that among God's ancient people the public calamities fell mostly upon the guilty parties, and the pious few often dwelt in security under His guardian care.

One of the greatest evils that can befall a nation is civil discord ; the king and his subjects being hostile to each other, and neither party being willing either to yield, or to come to any compromise ; the people also themselves entertaining opposite opinions, indulging in bitter strife, even to the shedding of blood. To this miserable state the Hebrew nation was brought in consequence of the apostasy of Solomon in the latter years of his life, and the foolish obstinacy of his demented son. After he had received many signal tokens of God's favour, erected the temple at Jerusalem, and dedicated it to the God of his fathers ; and after reigning for several years with unprecedented honour, exhibiting a singular combination of riches, godliness, and power ; Solomon abandoned himself to the pleasures of sense ; and, to gratify his heathen wives, he built, in the immediate vicinity of the house of God, temples for the practice of idolatry ; as if he intended openly to insult the Lord his Maker, and to brave the warning given him by his dying father : " If thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever." (1 Chron. xxviii. 9.) It would appear that to support the lavish expenditure of his court, he subjected his people to a heavy system of taxation, the pressure of which they felt to be intolerable ; and when his son Rehoboam succeeded to his father's throne, they applied for relief, and were met with a threat that the son would impose upon them heavier burdens than his father had ever done. The consequence was, that ten of the tribes renounced their allegiance to the house of David, and formed themselves into a rival and independent kingdom. (1 Kings xi., xii.)

Thus ended the greatness of the Hebrew nation, in

less than five hundred years after its entrance into the promised land. The hand of God was in the rupture. It was a judgment from Him, partly upon the house of David, so greatly dishonoured by the scandalous conduct of Solomon ; and partly upon the people generally, who, instead of resisting the public idolatry, had countenanced and practised it. With respect to the defection of the ten tribes, the sacred history says, “The cause was from the Lord ;” (1 Kings xii. 15;) and He Himself declared, “This thing is from Me.” (1 Kings xii. 24 ; xi. 31–37.)

The ten tribes, thus separated from their brethren, adopted a public system of idolatry, and with the generality of their kings pursued a downward course of ungodliness and immorality for about two hundred and fifty years, rivalling even the original inhabitants of the land in all that was hateful in the sight of God, till He would bear with them no longer. He sent His prophets to them, but the people and their infatuated kings were generally deaf to every warning, and regardless of every merciful invitation to return to Him. “They caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of His sight.” “The Lord rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until He had cast them out of His sight.” “So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day.” (2 Kings xvii. 17–23.) These sinners against God were never allowed to return.

That part of the Holy Land from which they were driven was afterwards taken possession of by a heathen people, who mixed their forms of pagan worship with the Mosaic rites; so that they "feared the Lord, and served their graven images." (2 Kings xvii. 24-41.) In the days of our Lord, they were known by the name of "the Samaritans," and are said to have worshipped they knew not what. (John iv. 22.)

The tribe of Judah still remained in possession of Jerusalem and of the temple, and retained their attachment to the kings belonging to the house of David; but the national glory was departed, and God was no longer with them as He had formerly been. While they lived in obedience to His laws, He engaged to protect them, their families, and their property, from the hands of the heathen; but this great benefit they had now forfeited by sin. Their country was repeatedly invaded, and even the temple pillaged of its richest ornaments; for the people, reduced in number, unable to defend themselves, and to a great extent abandoned by God, were glad to purchase safety at any price.

A few of the kings of Judah were in the main good men, who discountenanced immorality, and did what they could to secure a strict observance of the Mosaic rites; but a majority of them were thoroughly corrupt, and gave direct encouragement to idolatry in its worst forms. The kingdom of Judah, however, was borne with about one hundred and thirty years longer than the kingdom of Israel had been. The patience of God was then exhausted. The man who then occupied the throne was openly wicked. "Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after

all the abominations of the heathen ; and polluted the house of the Lord which He had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes, and sending them ; because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling-place : but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy. Therefore He brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age : He gave them all into his hand." (2 Chron. xxxvi. 14-17.) On this occasion the splendid temple built by Solomon, at an immense expense of money and labour, was destroyed, the walls of Jerusalem were thrown down, the houses of the princes demolished, and the people were led away captives to Babylon. Jeremiah, who had foretold these calamities, lived to be a sorrowful witness of them, and expressed the agonies of his broken heart in the Book of "Lamentations," which bears his name. While he depicts, in terms the most affecting, the miseries of the people and the subversion of the national institutions, he ascribes all to the righteous judgment of God, who poured out the vials of His wrath upon a sinful people. "The Lord hath accomplished His fury ; He hath poured out His fierce anger, and hath kindled a fire in Zion, and it hath devoured the foundations thereof." (Lam. iv. 11.)

There is one fact connected with the Babylonian captivity, which supplies direct proof of its providential

character, and shows that it did not take place according to what is called the natural course of events. The people are declared to have been sent into Babylon, "to fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths : for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years." (2 Chron. xxxvi. 21.) They were directed in the law of Moses to abstain every seventh year from the cultivation of the land ; and had the promise of a treble crop in the year preceding, that they might be under no alarm as to the want of food. (Lev. xxv. 2-4, 21.) This command they appear to have generally disregarded ; for we find no intimation in any part of Scripture of the observance of this precept ; and now their want of faith in God, and of submission to His will, was punished by banishment from the land where their conduct had been so criminal. It was determined that the land should lie fallow seventy years in succession ; because they had refused to let it lie fallow every seventh year, according to the command of God. It is a remarkable fact, that their sin in respect of the sabbatical year and its appropriate punishment are both anticipated in the writings of Moses. "I will scatter you among the heathen." "Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land." (Lev. xxvi. 33, 34.)

When the temple was destroyed, and the Jews were taken captives to Babylon as the punishment of their sin, some of the neighbouring nations that stood in a near relation to the people who were thus degraded, expressed a malignant pleasure on the occasion,—the Ammonites, Moabites, and the Edomites in particular.

Their conduct in this respect was so offensive to God, that He threatened them with a similar overthrow. We are thus taught that men ought not to rejoice at each other's misery ; but to pity even the culprit when he is under the chastisement of God. The sentence against the Ammonites will serve as a specimen. "Thus saith the Lord God ; Because thou saidst, Aha, against My sanctuary, when it was profaned ; and against the land of Israel, when it was desolate ; and against the house of Judah, when they went into captivity ; behold, therefore I will deliver thee to the men of the east for a possession, and they shall set their palaces in thee, and make their dwellings in thee : they shall eat thy fruit, and they shall drink thy milk." (Ezek. xxv. 1-13.) "He that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished." (Prov. xvii. 5.)

During the seventy years of their captivity the Jews were mercifully remembered by God. He gave special gifts to Daniel and his companions, so that they rendered important services to the Babylonian empire, and thus secured great benefits to their captive brethren. (Dan. i. 17.) "He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives." (Psalm cvi. 46.) He discovered and frustrated the murderous scheme of Haman, who sought their extermination ; (Esther vii. 5, 6;) and, at the end of the allotted period, He put it into the heart of Cyrus, a heathen sovereign, to give them their liberty, and make provision for the rebuilding of the temple, that their ancient form of worship might be resumed, and preparation made for the advent of the Messiah, the appointed time of which was drawing near. "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia,

that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord God of heaven given me ; and He hath charged me to build Him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people ? The Lord his God be with him, and let him go up." (2 Chron. xxxvi. 22, 23.) The name of Cyrus, and his appointment by God to be a means of rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple, had been declared by Isaiah nearly a hundred and eighty years before this proclamation was made, and therefore long before Cyrus was born. "The Lord" "saith of Cyrus, He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure : even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built ; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid." (Isai. xliv. 28.) The sight of this prediction, Josephus states, produced in the mind of Cyrus a feeling in favour of the Jewish people, and thus led him to undertake the service which was assigned to him by the providence of God.

Ezra and others likeminded availed themselves of the liberty thus given, and exerted themselves with a laudable zeal in the rebuilding of God's house ; and then, after the lapse of several years, Nehemiah was allowed to return to Jerusalem, and fortify the holy city, the place of his fathers' sepulchres. These devoted patriots encountered formidable opposition ; but they were men of prayer, of mighty faith, and of burning zeal, and the hand of God was with them. The work,

which was thus begun under the sanction of Cyrus, was further encouraged by his successors Darius and Artaxerxes, all of whom are spoken of as acting under a Divine impulse. "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia;" (Ezra i. 1;) He "turned the heart" of Darius to "strengthen the hands" of the men who were engaged in this pious enterprise; (Ezra vi. 22;) and He "put it into the heart" of Artaxerxes to complete the design. (Ezra vii. 27; Neh. ii. 8.) The conduct of these heathen sovereigns in affording their direct patronage for the rebuilding of the temple, the renewal of the Mosaic forms of worship, and the restoration of Jerusalem, presents a fine illustration of the fact, that "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will." (Prov. xxi. 1.) While God was thus merciful to His people, He humbled their national pride. He who had wrought wonders for them in the days of their fathers, now only allowed them to act as heathen men gave them leave. Once they were at the head of the heathen, and now the heathen were at the head of them. (Deut. xxviii. 13.) Such are the effects of sin!

Many of the Jews who returned from the captivity were lukewarm in the cause of religion, being more intent upon the cultivation of their lands and the increase of their worldly property, than concerned for the honour of God and the restoration of His worship; for which they were reproved and admonished by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah; and God in His just displeasure punished them by withholding from them the fruits of the earth. To these ungodly men Haggai said,

"Ye have sown much, and bring in little ; ye eat, but ye have not enough ; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink ; ye clothe you, but there is none warm ; and he that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house ; and I will take pleasure in it, saith the Lord." (Hag. i. 6-8.) While Haggai thus administered reproof, Zechariah gave the people encouragement. "Thus saith the Lord ; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem : and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth ; and the mountain of the Lord of hosts the holy mountain. Thus saith the Lord of hosts ; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof." (Zech. viii. 8-5.) These reproofs and promises produced the desired effect. "The elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo." (Ezra vi. 14.) "And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes : for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God." (Neh. vi. 16.) While the heathen were mortified, the people of God were filled with adoring gratitude. "They offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced : for God had made them rejoice with great joy : the wives also and the children rejoiced : so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off." (Neh. xii. 43.)

From the time of this signal manifestation of God's mercy in the restoration of the Jews to their own land, and the renewal of the Mosaic rites of Divine worship, to the coming of our Saviour, was a period of from four to five hundred years. During this interval they underwent various vicissitudes; being severely oppressed and persecuted by Antiochus, the heathen king of Syria; and they were successively brought into national subjection to the Greeks and Romans. It was their highest honour, that of them, "as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever." (Rom. ix. 5.) They were His covenant people; yet, when He appeared among them, they "received Him not;" (John i. 11;) and their conduct towards Him was their ruin. His manifestation to them was introduced by the wonderful ministry of the Baptist; and His claims to the Messiahship were demonstrated by His general character, by His miracles, by His resurrection from the dead, by the wonders of the day of Pentecost, by the fulfilment in Him of Old Testament prophecy, and by the miracles of the apostles: yet the nation generally rejected Him with the utmost bitterness of malignity, and their rulers declared their readiness to endure all the consequences of His crucifixion; saying, "His blood be on us, and on our children." (Matt. xxvii. 25.)

Their rejection of Him and of His Gospel, with the persecutions they inflicted upon His followers, filled up the measure of their iniquities, and brought upon them as a nation calamities which in extent and severity have never been equalled. He foretold their miseries, and declared that the "generation" then existing would "not pass away" till all that He had spoken was "ful-

filled." (Matt. xxiv. 1-35.) The siege and destruction of Jerusalem took place about thirty-nine or forty years after our Saviour's death, thus verifying His prediction. At that time it has been estimated that more than a million of people perished by the sword, by famine, and by the pestilence; the temple was burned; Jerusalem was laid in ruins; the people who survived the general slaughter were banished from the land of their fathers, and many of them sold into slavery. The Christians, who had fled to the city as a place of refuge when the war began, had received from their Lord a signal as to the time when they should retire; they escaped at the time; and there is reason to believe that not one of them perished in that terrible siege.

These miseries were inflicted upon the Jews by the Roman army, who had no object in view but the gratification of their vengeance upon a people who had defied their power; but they were, in fact, the unconscious instruments of the Almighty's will. He had provided the "feast" of Gospel blessings; He had sent His servants to invite the Jews, His covenant people, to "come" and partake of it: these people not only spurned the invitation, but barbarously slew the messengers God had sent. The consequence was, that "He was wroth: and He sent forth His armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city." (Matt. xxii. 7.) St. Paul has given the same view of their sad case. He says, they "both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is

come upon them to the uttermost." (1 Thess. ii. 15, 16.)

It was not, then, as the natural consequence of national profligacy and irreligion that the Hebrew nation perished, for they had "a zeal of God," though "not according to knowledge;" (Rom. x. 2;) but by the just judgment of God, as the punishment of their obstinate unbelief with respect to Christ and His Gospel. The Romans could demolish the temple, and terminate the Mosaic form of Divine worship, because such was the Almighty's will; but the Romans could not rebuild the temple, and restore that form of worship, when Julian the apostate emperor made the attempt in the fourth century, because the Almighty had otherwise determined.

The dealings of God with the Jewish people present an instructive view of Divine Providence. The God of their fathers gave them a law, and with it the promise of every blessing they could desire as the reward of obedience to His will; and He threatened to inflict upon them all the miseries they have ever endured as the certain punishment of transgression. (Lev. xxvi.) He engaged to give them a numerous posterity, abundant harvests, perfect security within the borders of their land, freedom from war and all annoyances from other nations; He engaged to dwell among them, granting them perpetual tokens of His presence and favour, especially in their religious assemblies; He promised also to send His Son among them, greater than Moses, to bestow upon them spiritual blessings, of which the rich productions of their country were but a faint type. These high privileges they forfeited by

sin, and they incurred the heaviest inflictions of Divine wrath. No other people were ever so favoured ; no other people ever sinned to the same extent ; and upon no other people was an equal degree of punishment ever inflicted. Their sad history proves that however God may, in the exercise of a wise sovereignty, prefer one nation before another, in respect of temporal blessings and of religious advantages, yet in the exercise of judgment there is with Him "no respect of persons." In every case sin will be visited with its appropriate penalty. The Jews were God's chosen people, elected to be the "witnesses" of His unity and supremacy through ages of heathen darkness and idolatry ; but they were, to a fearful extent, unfaithful to their calling ; and were therefore not only disinherited of their church-privileges, and of the land of plenty which had been given to them, but also subjected to miseries of unexampled severity.

We cannot conclude these observations concerning the Jewish people without directing attention to the fact, that as they were a means of preparing the way for the coming of Christ, and for the redemption of the world by His death ; and were, in truth, mainly raised up as a people for these express purposes ; so, notwithstanding the bitterness and intensity of their hostility to Him, they were largely instrumental in facilitating the spread of His Gospel among the heathen. In the time of the apostles the Jews were widely dispersed abroad in the world for trading purposes ; so that on the day of Pentecost "there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven," (Acts ii. 5,) having come to attend this great national festival,

We also find that at Damascus, (Acts ix. 20,) at Salamis, (Acts xiii. 5,) at Antioch in Pisidia, (Acts xiii. 14,) in Iconium, (Acts xiv. 1,) at Thessalonica, (Acts xvii. 1,) at Berea, (Acts xvii. 10,) at Athens, (Acts xvii. 17,) at Corinth, (Acts xviii. 4,) some of the principal cities of the Roman empire, there were Jewish synagogues, where the sons of Abraham, as God's witnesses, were accustomed to meet every Sabbath-day, to read and expound the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and to unite in prayer. It was impossible that these sacred buildings should be erected, and congregations regularly assemble in them, without exciting the attention of the people in their respective neighbourhoods. The heathen were thus publicly and impressively taught, in opposition to their own forms of idolatry, that there is one God, the Maker of heaven and earth, and of all that they contain; that mankind are all His offspring, whose high privilege it is to have access to Him in acts of religious worship; that He has given a written revelation of His will; and that He has appointed one day in seven as a day of holy rest, when men are specially invited to approach His mercy-seat. Accordingly we find connected with the Jews in their synagogues Gentile worshippers, both men and women, who are said to have "feared God," though they may not have conformed to all the peculiarities of the Mosaic law. In this manner many persons belonging to the Gentile race were prepared for the apostolic ministry, and received the Gospel with docility and gratitude; having been made acquainted with the elements of revealed truth by the instrumentality of the

Jews who were resident among them. (Acts xiii. 43 ; xvi. 14 ; xvii. 4, 12.)

At this day the Jews, in the same manner, prepare the way for the Gospel. They maintain the Divine authority of the law and the prophets, which testify of Christ ; they are a living demonstration of the truth of prophecy ; they exhibit in their character and condition the leading facts of the New Testament ; and in these respects are Christ's witnesses. Their testimony is unintentionally and unwillingly given, as it was in ancient times ; but given it is, by the overruling providence of God, and that upon a wide and extensive scale. Notwithstanding their perverseness and unbelief, they are still, in an important sense, "beloved for their fathers' sakes ;" the veil will therefore be ultimately taken from the Jewish heart, "and so all Israel shall be saved." (2 Cor. iii. 16 ; Rom. xi. 26, 28.) In the mean while, every practicable effort ought to be made by a Christian people to convince the Jews of the Messiahship of Jesus, and thus to effect their conversion to Him. They are, indeed, under a Divine malediction ; but it is not absolute. Christianity never appeared in a more perfect form than in the apostolic church at Jerusalem immediately after the Pentecost ; and its members belonged mostly to the Jewish race. (Acts ii. 41-47.)

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD WITH RESPECT TO NATIONS IN GENERAL.

We have seen that it pleased God to enter into a covenant with the tribes of Israel, so as to promise them temporal blessings in rich abundance as the reward of obedience to the laws which He gave them, and to threaten the infliction of temporal calamities as the punishment of transgression. His dealings with them as a nation were therefore in many respects peculiar, and are not strictly applicable to other civil communities. Yet to every nation His providential care is directed; for all men are the creatures of His power, partakers of His goodness, under the control of His almighty hand, dependent upon Him for all their enjoyments, and accountable to Him as "the Judge of all the earth."

No nation can exist without government, which is therefore declared to be an ordinance of God; and the men who are entrusted with the administration of it are called His "ministers," appointed "for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well." It is also said of Him, as a general declaration, applicable to heathen nations, and to Christian communities, as well as to His covenant people whose rulers were of His special appointment, "He setteth up

kings." (Dan. ii. 21.) To Nebuchadnezzar, the heathen monarch of Babylon, the prophet Daniel said, "The God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory." (Dan. ii. 37.) Of him also God Himself said, "I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, ~~My~~ servant;" "and all nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son." (Jer. xxvii. 6, 7.) The emperors of pagan Rome, and their deputies in the provinces of the empire, are spoken of also as the servants of God's will; and they were to be obeyed and prayed for in that character. (1 Tim. ii. 1, 2; 1 Peter ii. 13, 14, 17.) "Knowest thou not," said Pontius Pilate to our Saviour, "that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above." (John xix. 10, 11.)

Statesmen endued with wisdom, sagacity, foresight, and a patriotic spirit, who can form a just judgment of the course of events, so as to prepare for every emergency, are raised up by the good providence of God, and as such should be thankfully received whenever they appear. "He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding." (Dan. ii. 21.) When Saul was anointed to the kingly office, "God gave him another heart," qualifying him for the regal duties to which he was now called. (1 Sam. x. 9.) By the same means David was "wise, according to the wisdom of an angel of God, to know all things that are in the earth." (2 Sam. xiv. 20.) "God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore;"

far surpassing all ordinary bounds. (1 Kings iv. 29.) “And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged ; and they feared the king : for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment.” (1 Kings iii. 28.)

From these examples we learn that men who are called to the exercise of civil power, whether as kings, or as ministers of state, need special wisdom and sagacity, which they ought to ask of God, so that all their official acts may tend to His glory, and the welfare of the people over whom they are placed. Subjects should also ask of God heavenly wisdom and guidance for their rulers, to whom the interests of the public are confided. Praise and thanksgiving are no less due to God for wise and upright rulers, whose acts conduce to the general benefit of the community. “I exhort therefore,” says an inspired apostle, “that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men ; for kings, and all that are in authority ; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour ; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim. ii. 1-4.) Every national benefit comes from God, whatever may be the medium through which it is conveyed ; and to Him therefore the glory is due.

Next to civil rulers, as necessary in order to the well-being of a nation, are military and naval commanders. Till the reign of righteousness shall become universal, the science of war must be maintained, both as a means of defence against foreign aggression, and as an auxiliary to the civil power. The profession of arms is not

deemed generally favourable to Christian piety; yet armies have presented many examples of spirituality of mind, of pure morality, and of holy zeal; and even heathen soldiers have been honoured, in the use of arms, as instruments of good in the hands of Divine providence. A remarkable example of this we have in Naaman, "captain of the host of the king of Syria," who was cured of his leprosy in the time of Elisha. He "was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria : he was also a mighty man in valour." (2 Kings v. 1.) We have no reason to regard this as a solitary case. Many a man who knows not God is a means of fulfilling God's purposes of justice and of mercy, and of rendering valuable services to his country, and even to the world.

God's providential dealings with the heathen nations of antiquity present a striking combination of righteous anger and tender compassion. They lost the knowledge of God ; and this loss was at once their sin and punishment. There was a time when all the inhabitants of the earth knew God, and the kind of service that He required of them and would accept. But as the recollection of an infinitely holy and just being, always present with them, inspecting their conduct, and holding them responsible for every temper, word, and work, interfered with their sinful habits and pleasures, "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge," and therefore, as much as possible, dismissed all remembrance of Him from their minds ; never mentioning His name, never meeting together to celebrate His worship, never teaching their children to fear and love

Him. In this manner the knowledge of God became extinct through the wide extent of the heathen world. Generations arose who had never heard of Him who made all worlds, and to whom every human being owes a spiritual worship, a perfect love, and an entire obedience.

But when the people had lost the knowledge of God, they had not lost their feeling of moral obligation ; for conscience is an essential element of human nature, of which therefore no man can ever divest himself ; neither had they lost their feeling of helplessness, of misery, of dependence, and their need of such help and protection as they could not themselves command. Hence the origin of idolatry. Having no knowledge of Him who is an infinite and eternal Spirit, and who alone is able to meet the cravings of our intellectual and immortal nature, they endeavoured to supply the lack by imaginary deities, and by tangible objects of worship, " graven by art and man's device." (Acts xvii. 29.) As they loved the darkness of error, rather than the light of truth, which God had revealed in the patriarchal times, He in righteous displeasure gave them up to their own delusions.

But this was not the whole of their sad case. " Their deeds were evil," while the objects and forms of their worship were alike vain. They entered upon a downward course of immorality, growing worse and worse in every succeeding age, till they were little less than incarnate fiends. Their character, as it is described by the pen of inspiration, (Rom. i. 24 28,) can scarcely be read without a thrill of horror : and with respect to their immoral practices, as well as their revolting errors,

God is said to have “given them up.” He “suffered all nations to walk in their own ways” of error, ungodliness, misery, and sin. (Acts xiv. 16.)

Yet the Holy Scriptures distinctly teach, that God’s abandonment of the heathen was not entire, but partial and comparative. It was a sore judgment, but it was mixed with mercy. He did not give them any new revelation, to relieve their darkness; nor did He send among them inspired prophets, except in the case of Nineveh and Babylon; yet He so arranged the dispensations of His providence towards them, “that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him;” for, guilty and corrupt as they were, “He was not far from every one of them,” inasmuch as “in Him they lived, and moved, and had their being.” (Acts xvii. 27, 28.) In all nature, above, around, beneath, He presented to them sensible demonstrations of “His eternal power and Godhead;” so that in worshipping “dumb idols” they were “without excuse.” (Rom. i. 20.) In other respects also “He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons,” filling the hearts of the people “with food and gladness;” (Acts xiv. 17;) and in every case “the goodness of God” is designed and adapted to “lead” men to “repentance.” (Rom. ii. 4.) Nor must we forget that the plagues of Egypt, the passage of the Red Sea, the eventful history of Israel in the wilderness, and the extermination of the Canaanitish nations, were all intended to assert the power and supremacy of God upon the widest scale, so that “His name might be declared throughout all the earth.” (Exod. ix. 16; Rom. ix. 17.) At the

same time the Hebrew people, through the fifteen centuries of their national existence, had much intercourse with neighbouring nations, being widely dispersed in the world, partly in consequence of their commercial habits, and partly by means of their captivities ; and in a very important sense they were God's "witnesses."

We are not therefore surprised to find that He who thus extends His care to the heathen has always exercised over them a moral control. "God reigneth over the heathen ;" (Psalm xlvi. 8;) "the Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought." (Psalm xxxiii. 10.) He humbled the pride of Egypt, when she cruelly oppressed His people, and set Him at defiance ; and He afterwards declared that Egypt should in perpetuity be "the basest of the kingdoms." (Ezek. xxix. 15.)

He condemned the Amalekites to a national extinction on account of their daring hostility to Him and to His people. These bloody marauders made a presumptuous, cowardly, and unprovoked attack upon the tribes of Israel, immediately after their passage through the Red Sea ; unawed by the judgments of God which had just been inflicted upon the Egyptians, and regardless of the favour with which He treated the nation whom He had chosen. When he had given them a miraculous supply of water, "then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim :" the very spot where the water flowed from the smitten rock. The probability is, that they intended to drive the Israelites from the stream, and appropriate it to themselves ; as well as to seize the property which the Hebrews possessed. Be this as it may, they "smote the hindmost" of the people, those that were "faint and weary ;" and they

"feared not God," but, like Pharaoh, set Him at defiance. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua : for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." (Exod. xvii. 14 ; Deut. xxv. 18.)

The people of Moab and Ammon, descendants from Lot, the nephew of Abraham, are often mentioned in the Old Testament as hostile to the people of God, and therefore the objects of His just displeasure. "Therefore as I live, saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation." (Zeph. ii. 9.)

The Edomites, descended from Esau, and therefore standing in a near relation to the house of Israel, made themselves parties to the demolition of the temple, and the captivity of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin ; and God's sentence against them as a nation was, "For thy violence against thy brother Jacob, shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever." "As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee." (Obad. 10, 15.)

Other cities and nations, of greater power and distinction, were humbled by God in a similar manner, on account of their ungodliness and immorality. Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, and was spared at the time, but soon after relapsed into its former state of levity and sin. The Almighty therefore said, "I will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness. And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations : both the cormorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it ; their voice

shall sing in the windows ; desolation shall be in the thresholds." "This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me : how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in ! Everyone that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand." (Zeph. ii. 13 15.) In fulfilment of this threatening, Nineveh ceased to be the residence of the Assyrian kings. The government was transferred to Babylon, and Nineveh became a perpetual ruin.

Tyre, a city on the Phœnician coast, was assigned by Joshua to the tribe of Asher, but does not appear to have been ever taken out of the hands of its original possessors, so that it retained its heathen character. For a long time it was the most distinguished seaport in the world, a place of immense traffic, of vast wealth, of consummate pride, and of enormous wickedness. When the Holy Land was invaded, as it repeatedly was, by heathen people, the temple being plundered of its treasures, and the people carried off as captives, the merchants of Tyre, it would appear, were ready to purchase the spoils. The ornaments of God's house they placed in the temples of their own idols ; and the captive Israelites, men, women, and children, they sold as slaves. On these, as well as on other grounds, Tyre became an object of God's indignation. "Ye have taken," said He, "My silver and My gold, and have carried into your temples My goodly pleasant things. The children also of Judah, and the children of Jerusalem, have ye sold unto the Grecians, that ye might remove them far from their border." (Joel iii. 5, 6.) "Thus saith the Lord God ; Behold, I am against thee,

O Tyrus, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth his waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyrus, and break down her towers: I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. It shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea." (Ezek. xxvi. 3-5.)

The most formidable enemies of the Hebrew nation were the Assyrians, whose seat of empire was Babylon, and whose monarchs, at the head of vast armies, invaded Judea mostly for the purpose of plunder, exacting tribute from the people, and seizing them as slaves. They were permitted by God to commit these depredations upon His people, as the punishment of sin; but Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar, the principal authors of the evil, "meant it not so." They had no regard for the honour of the God of Israel, or concern for the violation of His law, but aimed simply at the gratification of their own covetousness and ambition. They were therefore justly punished by Him for their acts of cruelty and oppression, as well as the people who concurred with them in these unrighteous deeds. God's anger against ancient Babylon, the declared enemy of His people, is a prominent subject in the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah. "Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall

dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces : and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged." (Isai. xiii. 19-22.)

Nothing is more offensive to God than pride, and an affectation of independence in civil rulers, who are the servants of His will, and accountable to Him for their public and official acts, as well as for their private conduct. When Herod, who "killed James the brother of John with the sword," and in the wantonness of his tyranny made arrangements for shedding the blood of Peter for the pleasure of the Jews, suffered the people to honour him as "a god," "he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost," being smitten by the hand of an angel for his atrocious cruelty and pride. (Acts xii. 2, 3, 22, 23.) When Nebuchadnezzar, in the plenitude of his arrogance and folly, said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" he was instantly deprived of his understanding, reduced to the condition of a beast, and was told, "The kingdom is departed from thee." (Dan. iv. 30, 31.) His son Belshazzar "knew of this," but refused to take warning. Babylon was taken, and he was slain in the midst of an idolatrous feast, at which the sacred vessels taken from the temple of God were intentionally profaned. (Dan. v. 1-4, 22, 30.) "Those that walk in pride He is able to abase." (Dan. iv. 37.) "The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men." (Dan. iv. 17.) "He removeth kings, and setteth up kings." (Dan. ii. 21.) "He poureth

contempt upon princes, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness, where there is no way ;” (Psalm cvii. 40;) especially such as have long abused their power by acts of tyranny and of cruel persecution. Modern times, as well as remote ages, supply monitory examples of this kind.

Wicked kings are not unfrequently punished in their posterity, as well as in their persons, and that by the judgment of God. An impressive example of this we have in the case of Jeroboam, who established among the ten tribes of Israel a system of idolatrous worship. “It came to pass, when” Baasha “reigned, that he smote all the house of Jeroboam; he left not to Jeroboam any that breathed, until he had destroyed him, according unto the saying of the Lord, which He spake by His servant Ahijah the Shilonite.” (1 Kings xv. 29.) Yet this very man, whom God appointed to inflict this punishment upon the family of Jeroboam, brought the same sentence of extermination upon his own family by imitating Jeroboam in his sin. “I will,” said God, “take away the posterity of Baasha, and the posterity of his house; and will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Him that dieth of Baasha in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth of his in the fields shall the fowls of the air eat.” (1 Kings xvi. 3, 4.) To Ahab, another wicked king, and a persecutor of God’s true worshippers, Elijah made a similar announcement in the name of Almighty God. “I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity;” “and will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the

provocation wherewith thou hast provoked Me to anger, and made Israel to sin." (1 Kings xxi. 21, 22.)

From the dealings of God with the Hebrew people and their rulers, Christian nations may, to a great extent, learn the obligations under which they lie, and the destiny that awaits them. Like His ancient people, they have a written revelation of His will, to which they are bound to conform, not only as individuals and families, but as civil communities. In every respect His will is their rule of duty; and of His will the written word is the authentic record, which they disregard at their peril. Whether then the government of a Christian state be monarchial, or republican; whether it be an absolute or a mixed monarchy; all its laws ought to be characterized by justice and equity, and administered without respect of persons; the just claims of private conscience should be met, so that everyone may worship God in the way that to himself appears most acceptable, and conducive to edification; the ordinances of God, especially His Sabbath, and the marriage relation, should be sacredly guarded by law; oppression and wrong everywhere suppressed; and the rights of all, even of the meanest, effectually protected. Slavery is essentially anti-Christian, being equally opposed to justice and humanity; and the practice of it in a Christian state is utterly indefensible, however it may have been tolerated in the patriarchal times, and under the Mosaic economy, when the spiritual privileges and moral duties of mankind were less perfectly revealed than they have been since the manifestation of the Son of God in the human nature. "Vengeance belongeth unto Me," saith the Lord; and He will call

every wrongdoer to a strict account. He inflicted sore judgments upon Egypt for its cruel treatment of the tribes of Israel ; and when men, women, and children, in a land professedly Christian, cry to Him under similar treatment, He will assuredly hear them, and make their oppressors quail and tremble under the inflictions of His arm : for against “ all unrighteousness of men ” He has revealed His “ wrath.” (Rom. i. 18.)

‘ All national blessings are the gifts of God, and therefore call for grateful acknowledgments to Him. Such is peace, both at home and abroad. He only is able to control the malignant passions of men, so as to bring wars and contentions to an end. “ Lord, Thou wilt ordain peace for us.” (Isai. xxvi. 12.) “ The Lord will bless His people with peace.” (Psalm xxix. 11.) “ He maketh peace in thy borders.” (Psalm cxlvii. 14.) “ He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth ; He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder ; He burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God.” (Psalm xlvi. 9, 10.) He “ stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people.” (Psalm lxv. 7.)

The hand of God is no less manifest in plentiful harvests, propitious seasons, general health, and a numerous, united, and contented people. “ Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness ; and Thy paths drop fatness.” (Psalm lxxv. 11.) “ I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees shall yield their fruit.” “ Ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid.” “ I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you.” (Lev. xxvi. 4, 6, 9.) “ I will take sickness away from

the midst of thee." (Exod. xxiii. 25.) "David took not the number of them from twenty years old and under : because the Lord had said He would increase Israel like to the stars of the heavens." (1 Chron. xxvii. 23.)

National blessings like these, in which all classes of the community freely participate, demand a grateful and public acknowledgment. Nothing therefore can be more becoming in a Christian state than the offering up of thanksgiving to God, not only in the ordinary religious assemblies of the people, but on days solemnly set apart for the service, in which the rich and the poor, the young and the aged, the sovereign, the ministers of state, the working people and their employers, should alike combine. Such demonstrations are especially appropriate after a plentiful harvest has been gathered in, or when any public calamity has been removed, such as war, sickness, or domestic strife and commotion. National homage rendered to God, when sincere, cannot be less acceptable to Him than that which is offered by families, or by individuals in the closet.

In a people professedly Christian no sins are more offensive to God than the pride of wealth, or of national strength and greatness, inordinate luxury, and indifference to the necessities of the poor. Riches are not given to support personal vanity. They are a trust from God, of which an account must be rendered to Him in the last great day. "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy ; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate ; laying up in store for them-

selves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." (1 Tim. vi. 17-19.) "Relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." (Isai. i. 17.) "He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy." (James ii. 13.) God requires the rich of every nation to care for the poor, and will punish those who neglect this important duty; and He, in an especial manner, commits the abject classes of society to the protection of civil rulers, and threatens to inflict terrible chastisement upon those of them who are unfaithful to their trust.

Whatever may be the resources of a nation, its continued existence and prosperity must depend upon the will of God. He can turn the wisest counsels into foolishness, and confound the schemes of the most sagacious statesmen. And what are the most numerous and best-disciplined armies, unless they be directed by a wisdom which He only can supply? Of what avail was the mighty armament of Sennacherib, when, smitten by the angel of the Lord, one hundred and eighty-five thousand of them died in one night? (Isai. xxxvii. 36;) or the still greater armament of "Zerah the Ethiopian," consisting of "a thousand thousand" men, who "were destroyed before the Lord, and before His host?" (2 Chron. xiv. 9, 13.) A false movement in a battle, or a sudden panic, may render abortive the most formidable and promising military arrangements. "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." (Psalm xx. 7.) "The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the Lord." (Prov. xxi. 31.) How many cities and nations, once great and flourish-

ing, have by their pride, irreligion, and self-confidence, brought upon themselves irretrievable ruin ! To Tyre, with its fortifications and vast wealth, the Almighty said, “ Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a god, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas ; ” “ all they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee : thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more.” (Ezek. xxviii. 2, 19.) Of nations then, as well as of individuals and families, it may be said with truth, “ Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” (Prov. xvi. 18.) Mystic Babylon, like her ancient sister, in the fulness of her pride and self-confidence “ saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine ; and she shall be utterly burned with fire : for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.” (Rev. xviii. 7, 8.)

National sins, of which princes and people are equally guilty, are often referred to in Holy Scripture, as the direct causes of national misery. To the officers of government an upright monarch once said, “ Take heed what ye do : for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you ; take heed and do it : for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts.” (2 Chron. xix. 6, 7.) When the common people sinned, the ancient prophets warned them with equal plainness and fidelity. “ This was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did

she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before Me: therefore I took them away as I saw good." (Ezek. xvi. 49, 50.) "The harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of His hands. Therefore My people are gone into captivity." (Isai. v. 12, 13.) Fraudulent transactions in business, formality and hypocrisy in religion, intemperance, infidelity in the marriage relation, extravagance in dress, the violation of the Sabbath, lying, idleness, and the neglect of relative duties, are all referred to in Holy Scripture, as things which provoke the Lord to anger, and thus bring ruin upon nations.

The Almighty is pleased sometimes to punish profligate and ungodly nations by placing over them incompetent rulers, who, by deeds of rashness, injustice, and folly, introduce internal disorder and misery, such as the prophet describes when he says, "The Lord of Hosts doth take away the mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient, the captain of fifty, and the honourable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator. And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them. And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour: the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable." "As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them." (Isai. iii. 1-5, 12.) Fearful is the state of a nation when no men of competent ability appear, to command the

general confidence of the community, and to conduct with advantage the government in its various departments.

Another punishment of national sin is war; which, considered in itself, is one of the greatest calamities that can befall a people, especially civil war, and most of all in the localities where fierce and bloody battles are fought. In such contests thousands of men, in all the beauty and strength of their manhood, are slain; thousands more are wounded and maimed for life; the fruits of the earth are wasted, and dwelling-houses razed to their foundations; sick and aged people perish in the attempt to escape, private property is extensively destroyed, and honest people are utterly ruined. David was a man of war, and had seen much of its carnage and misery; and when three things were proposed to him, as the punishment of the sin of numbering the tribes of Israel,—three years of famine; or the people's flight for three months before the sword of a conquering army; or three days of pestilence, the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel,—he chose the last, terrible as it was, regarding it as the least evil of the three: “and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men.” (1 Chron. xxi. 12–14.)

Pestilential diseases, as the punishment of guilty nations, were not peculiar to remote ages of the world. Their ravages have been felt with equal severity, and to the same extent, in modern times. Such was “the sweating sickness,” which began in the year 1348, and in a comparatively short period spread “lamentation and mourning and woe” through the principal nations of Asia, Europe, and the north of Africa. “Some say that where it was most favourable, it left one-third,

or one of five; but where it showed its tyranny more freely, it scarce left a fifteenth or a twentieth person alive." "The method of the plague was to stay but two or three days with any person, (for it surely killed in that or less time,) and but five or six months in any place." "It took men generally in the head and stomach, appearing first in the groin, or under the armpits, by little knobs or swellings, called kernels, being boils, blains, blisters, pimples, weals, or plague-sores, generally attended with pestilential fevers, which occasioned spitting or vomiting of blood; whence for the most part they died in a manner presently, or within half a day, or within a day or two at the most. After the third day, though seldom they lived so long, there was hope; and yet, then, many falling into a deep sleep never waked more."\* Somewhat similar in its nature was the great plague of London, which in the year 1665 is said to have carried off no less than one hundred thousand persons. In our own times the Asiatic cholera appeared in India, and then spread through most of the European nations, extending itself to America, producing death and consternation in its progress, sparing neither the rich nor the poor, the aged nor the young, withering at once the strength of the most healthy and robust. It still lingers in the East, and still baffles the highest medical skill. Whatever subordinate and secondary causes may have been concerned in originating these frightful forms of disease, we may say respecting every one of them, as the magi-

\* Barnes's History of Edward III., p. 432. Edit. 1688.. A minute and extended account of this fearful visitation is given by this learned and accurate historian.

tians of Egypt said, when smarting under a power which they could not resist, "This is the finger of God." (Exod. viii. 19.)

In seasons of national calamity, national repentance is an appropriate duty, including a public and penitential confession of sin, and a renunciation of the evils which have excited the Divine displeasure. When the prophet Joel announced the plague of locusts, eating up the entire produce of the country, so as to cause a general famine, he said, "Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare Thy people, O Lord." "Then will the Lord be jealous for His land, and pity His people." (Joel ii. 15-18.)

A national fast, however, to answer the end proposed, must be attended by the abandonment of national sin. To confess sin to God, and ask the forgiveness of it, when at the same time the practice of it is obstinately continued, is a grievous insult offered to Him. To a people who practised this foul hypocrisy He said in righteous indignation, mingled with mercy, "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou

hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward. Thou shalt call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and He shall say, Here I am." (Isai. lviii. 6-9.)

Of all the nations now existing, Great Britain is perhaps the most highly favoured with respect to religious advantages; and providential blessings are showered upon her with an unsparing hand. Among her children the knowledge of letters is general, and might be universal; the Holy Scriptures are accessible to all; Christian sanctuaries are everywhere open on the Lord's day; though Popery and other forms of error equally destructive exist among us, yet the Gospel is preached in its apostolic simplicity and form; multitudes exemplify its purity and blessedness in their lives; evangelical ordinances are administered without any admixture of anti-Christian superstition; everyone is at liberty to follow the dictates of his own conscience in matters of religion. At the same time, all the luxuries of life are supplied, if not by our own soil, by our colonies, and by every clime. It is difficult to conceive what more could be done for the people of these realms than is done for them already by the grace and providence of God.

Yet fears for Britain's safety are often expressed by good men, on account of the sins which so extensively prevail within her borders; especially the infidelity, the intemperance, the neglect of religious ordinances, the profanation of the Sabbath, the national pride, the eager grasping after wealth, and the various other forms of

ungodliness and sin which everywhere meet the eye. Many persons have therefore expressed their alarm lest Almighty God, in His just displeasure, should deliver her into the hands of those who envy her greatness, and cherish a mortifying recollection of her former naval and military victories. On the other hand, it has been observed that God is not wont to subvert a nation where a great revival of religion is in progress, and especially a revival which extends its benefits to the world at large. Such is the encouraging state of things in this country at present. Let us then use every means of defence that patriotism can devise, and then put ourselves under the shadow of the Almighty by constant prayer, and the fulfilment of all His will ; and especially by the use of every means for the advancement of spiritual religion, and of a pure morality. With a rapidly-increasing population, abounding wealth and luxury, an infidel press extensively at work, and Reverend professors in our seats of learning attempting to throw discredit upon the leading doctrines of the Bible, and even upon the Bible itself ; it becomes every Protestant community to put forth all its strength in providing places of public worship, and the ministers of Christ to emulate the zeal and fidelity of the apostles in the enforcement of “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD WITH RESPECT TO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

By the Christian church, generally speaking, is meant the entire body of people that bear the name of Christ, and profess His religion. In a more restricted sense, by the Christian church is meant the people who believe in Christ with the heart unto righteousness, and are therefore personally justified through His blood, and sanctified by His Spirit. They live by faith in Him, and show the power and vitality of their faith by works of evangelical obedience; not satisfying themselves with saying to Christ, "Lord, Lord;" but being careful in all things to practise what He has commanded.

Into this holy brotherhood, denominated the catholic church, individuals are admitted by baptism administered "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." (Matt. xxviii. 19.) The children of believers are baptized in early life, and are then trained in the instruction and discipline of the Lord; and adult persons, who have not been born of Christian parents, are baptized by their own free consent, when they give proof of a sincere desire to be saved by Christ, and to live in subjection to His will.

The Christian church is formed of many distinct communities scattered over the islands and continents

of the earth. It consisted, in the first instance, of the apostles and disciples of our blessed Lord, resident mostly in Jerusalem; to whom three thousand penitent and believing Jews were added on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit, in the fulness of His power, came down to supply the place of Christ, intending to continue His operations till the end of time. The number soon increased to five thousand, of whom it is said, They "were of one heart and of one soul;" so entire was their unity, the unity of holy love, under the rich anointing of the Spirit. (Acts iv. 4, 32.) Afterwards "multitudes" more were added to them "both of men and women." (Acts v. 14.) The church, thus humble in its origin, was soon extended far and wide by means of the apostolic ministry; so that in one age its members appeared in organized communities in the principal cities of the Roman empire; and it is the declared purpose of its Founder and Head that it shall spread throughout the earth, and be perpetuated to the end of the world.

Unlike the Hebrew church, which was founded upon the principle of natural descent from Abraham, through the line of Isaac and of Jacob, the Christian church is founded upon the principle of personal faith in Christ, and is open alike to Jew and Gentile, and will never be superseded, either in respect of its doctrine or its constitution. It is "built upon a rock;" and the "gates of hell shall not prevail against it:" (Matt. xvi. 18:) meaning, as we apprehend, that neither the policy nor the power of Satan and of his infernal associates shall ever terminate the community of Christian people, should even the rulers of the earth join in con-

federacy with them. "The church on earth can never fail," secure in the guardian care of Omnipotence. On this subject, it is observable, the faith of the apostles never wavered. Whatever powers might be leagued against the church, and whatever evils might appear within its pale, they never entertained the thought of its extinction. In an ascription of praise to God, St. Paul says, "Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end;" (Eph. iii. 21;) and with respect to the Lord's supper, he said to the Christians at Corinth, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come:" (1 Cor. xi. 26:) clearly assuming, that, "throughout all ages," till the Lord shall come to raise the dead and to judge the world, the church will exist, and will observe this sacramental ordinance, in obedience to His command.

While the care of Divine providence is extended to every object of the creation, the minutest not excepted, its tenderest regards are reserved for the church, especially those members of it who "worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." (Phil. iii. 3.) In order to the church's stability, edification, extension, and usefulness, the Holy Scriptures have been written. To the sacred books of the Old Testament, to which the incarnate Son of God gave His direct and explicit sanction as the undoubted word of God, are added the sacred books of the New, completing the revelation of God's counsel and will. The importance and value of this holy volume, every part of which is given by inspiration of God, it is impossible fully to estimate. It contains

the only authentic record of the creation of the universe ; of the primitive state of man ; of the origin of evil in the world ; of God's providential and gracious dealings with mankind from the earliest ages ; of the birth, ministry, miracles, and sacrificial death of the Son of God ; of the nature and method of salvation ; of the duties thence arising ; and of the future destiny of the human race. The Bible is the embodiment of spiritual and moral truth, the great principles of which could never have been known but by revelation from God, whose " testimonies are wonderful." (Psalm cxix. 129.)

"The' Almighty, rising, His long sabbath broke!  
 The world was made, was ruin'd, was restored;  
 Laws from the skies were publish'd, were repeal'd;  
 On earth kings, kingdoms, rose; kings, kingdoms fell;  
 Famed sages lighted up the pagan world;  
 Prophets from Zion darted a keen glance  
 Through distant age; saints travell'd; martyrs bled;  
 By wonders sacred nature stood controll'd;  
 The living were translated; dead were raised;  
 Angels, and more than angels, came from heaven;  
 \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*  
 That hallow'd page fools scoff at was inspired,—  
 OF ALL THESE TRUTHS THRICE VENERABLE CODE!"\*

Here then is a standard of truth, in a written and permanent form, intended to regulate the conduct of individual Christians, and to be the subject of the church's teaching to the end of the world. By these inspired records individual believers are instructed, encouraged, warned, and, in one word, are made " wise unto salvation ;" and by the dissemination of Scripture truth, enforced by Scripture authority, that is, the

\* Young.

authority of God, the church will subdue the world to Christ. In this her strength lies. This is her true power. "If any man speak," says St. Peter,—evidently meaning, if he speak in the church, or speak in the name of God, and for the advancement of His work and honour,—"let him speak as the oracles of God:" (1 Peter iv. 11:) let what he advances be drawn from the inspired writings, and be in full accordance with their teaching, that it may come with due authority, and produce its desired effect. For, what was said of the vain and powerless ministrations of false prophets in ancient times is justly applicable to all merely human opinions and speculations in matters of religion: "What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not My word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Jer. xxiii. 28, 29.)

How wonderfully has the Almighty, in His adorable providence, watched over these sacred books, some of which have been in existence more than three thousand years! During these ages what changes have come over the world! Mighty empires have risen and fallen; battles have been fought, and victories won; powerful dynasties have flourished, and disappeared; barbarous nations have been civilized, and civilized nations have become barbarous; islands and continents previously unknown have been discovered; science and literature have been cultivated, and then neglected. The face of the world has been changed, generation after generation has passed away; but the sacred books remain in all their integrity. Our blessed Saviour charged the Jews with many and great sins, but never with the sin of tampering with the sacred text. They misinterpreted

the word of God, and made its precepts of “no effect by their traditions;” but they were faithful in the conservation of the word itself; and in all their hardships, dispersions, and persecutions, they still adhere to the letter of their Bible. After ages of bitter suffering from the heathen, in which Christians were required on pain of death to deliver up their copies of the New Testament, that they might be destroyed, the New Testament remains. Not a page of it has perished in the lapse of time. Infidels and Romish priests still burn the copies they can lay their hands upon, like the heathen of old; but no power upon earth can take away the book, or even alter its character. The very attempt to mutilate the sacred text will be punished with perdition. (Rev. xxii. 18, 19.)

And now, after a long period of ignorance and comparative inattention to the sacred writings, men of profound scholarship, of indomitable patience and industry, are raised up, who spend their lives in the collation of manuscripts, that they may present the sacred text in a state of perfect purity. Others there are who devote their days and nights to the translation of the inspired volume into the languages of modern tribes and nations, that the entire human family may read what God the Holy Ghost has dictated, and for themselves judge of its meaning. Others, again, ransack the literature and antiquities of every ancient nation, that by the discovery of historic facts, of peculiar forms of expression, of obsolete manners and customs, and specimens of art, they may throw light upon obscure parts of the sacred volume, and render them intelligible to ordinary readers; while learned expositors of a different class assiduously

labour to elicit the theological teaching of the Bible, in order to the advancement of Christian godliness. And who is it that raises up men duly qualified for these various forms of duty with respect to "the lively oracles;" and inclines them to engage in these diversified services for the benefit of the church and of the world? The true answer is,—God, in His adorable providence, who is the Guardian of His truth, and the Saviour of men.

But the gift of the Holy Scriptures, their uncorrupted preservation, and the raising up of men duly qualified to explain and defend them, are not the only proofs that God gives of His care for the church. The ministry which He has instituted, and which He sustains in perpetuity, is another demonstration of His concern for the church's welfare, and a pledge of its continuance to the end of the world. By this ministry three distinct objects are intended to be secured: the edification of the church; the maintenance of its purity; and its extension in the world. By the edification of the church is meant the improvement of its members in personal religion; so that their knowledge of Divine truth may be increased, their faith strengthened, their hope confirmed, and their love made perfect. These purposes are all secured by God's blessing upon the faithful preaching of the Gospel, which is designed to lead believers onward in the ways of God, till their sanctification is complete, and their practical conformity to His will entire.

The purity of the church in this world is not absolute, but comparative. After all possible vigilance has been used, evil will occasionally appear among its

members. Some will lose their spirituality, become lukewarm and negligent, and then fall into open sin. Were such persons to remain uncensured and accredited members of the church, their brethren, who thus express their approval of them, would be partakers of their sin, and would cease to be "the salt of the earth." In such cases the church loses its power; it is no longer a faithful witness for God; its members assume a worldly character; and, in fact, take their place among "them that are without." The maintenance of the church's purity God has confided to His ministers, on whom He has conferred a pastoral character, and whose duty it is to preserve among His people a godly discipline, so that the honour of His truth and ordinances may never be compromised.

That Christ has redeemed the whole human race by His death, that He intends His Gospel to supplant every form of error in the world, and that Christianity shall become the one religion of mankind, is the express teaching of the Bible; and these objects it is His purpose to accomplish by the faithful preaching of His truth. This service He has assigned to His ministers, who are to go forth in His name, proclaiming His Gospel to "every creature," that they may bring all nations to "the obedience of faith." (Rom. i. 5.)

A ministry having these objects it pleased God to institute at the commencement of the evangelical dispensation. He first appointed the twelve apostles, with whom He associated two other classes of extraordinary ministers, to whom the names of "prophets" and "evangelists" are applied. The apostles all possessed the plenary inspiration of the Holy Ghost, giving them

a complete and infallible knowledge of the Gospel, ability to preach it intelligibly in the languages and dialects of the earth, and a power of working miracles ; and were specially appointed to attest the fact of Christ's resurrection. The "prophets" had the gift of inspiration to a certain extent, which they exercised in the Christian assemblies, uttering truth in a devotional manner, at the immediate dictation of the Holy Spirit. The "evangelists" were eminent officers who acted under apostolic direction, preaching the Gospel, and regulating the affairs of churches.

All these were extraordinary ministers, whose services were confined to one age. When the apostles died, they left no men possessed of the same authority and qualifications which they had themselves received from the Lord Christ. The gift of "prophecy," in the sense explained, has not been perpetuated in the church ; and when the apostles were no more, the "evangelists" who survived them doubtless continued to preach the Gospel, to plant churches, and to regulate the churches they had planted ; but whether they interfered in the affairs of other churches, which they had not themselves planted, when they were no longer sanctioned in so doing by apostolic authority, is very doubtful. We therefore regard the three classes of ministers now mentioned as having only a temporary appointment and existence. They left no successors having the same qualifications and credentials. They were the gifts of God to the world, intended to accomplish a special work ; and, having done that work, they were withdrawn by the sovereign Lord of all.

There is a ministry, however, less gifted indeed, but still efficient, which will end only with time itself. It

was instituted by the apostles, who acted in the name and by the authority of Christ. The men to whom it was confided are in the New Testament denominated "elders," "bishops," "pastors," and "teachers :" names which clearly indicate the kind of work to which they were called. They were not "novices," but men of some age and standing in the church ; they were to "preach the word," so as to instruct its members, and convert the heathen ; they were to sustain the pastoral oversight of the churches with which they were connected, and "watch for souls, as they that must give account" to Christ, "the Chief Shepherd," to whom the entire flock belongs.

The perpetuation of this ministry is effected by the direct and uninterrupted interposition of Divine providence, in connexion with the grace of the Holy Spirit. "Pastors and teachers," being ministers of the class now mentioned, were ordained in all the apostolic churches, and are declared to be the gifts of Christ, as well as those who sustained the higher character of apostles, prophets, and evangelists. "Wherefore He saith, when He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." "And He gave some apostles ; and some prophets ; and some evangelists ; and some pastors and teachers ; for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Eph. iv. 8, 11, 12.) Now if these ordinary ministers were, in the first instance, the gift of Christ, they are so still. He has not only created the office, but He raises up men to fill it, so as to accomplish His own gracious purpose in His church and in the world.

On this subject the teaching of the apostle is con-

firmed by that of our Saviour, who describes the ministers and pastors of the church as stewards in God's house, appointed to give their fellow-servants their "portion of meat in due season." (Luke xii. 42.) Stewards in a family are not appointed by the servants of the family, but by the master of the house, to whom they are directly and specially accountable. On another occasion, when Jesus saw great numbers of people resorting to Him for instruction, He looked upon them with pity, and said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest." (Matt. ix. 37, 38.) According to the narrative of St. Luke, our Lord gave this direction after He had chosen His twelve apostles, and was sending forth His seventy disciples. Yet still the harvest-field was inadequately supplied with workmen, and God only could meet the demand. This is a standing rule to the church. Till the world is converted to the faith of Christ, Gospel labourers will be needed; duly qualified labourers God only is able to supply: and therefore the prayers of His people should be earnestly addressed to Him that He would "thrust forth" such men in sufficient numbers, that the harvest of the world may be gathered in. Complaints are often made that ministers do not possess higher intellectual endowments than their sermons usually display; but it may be fairly doubted whether those who are the most forward to complain are not the most negligent in offering the prayer which our Saviour commanded. What right have we to expect blessings for which we never pray? Prayer for gifted and efficient ministers should

be offered, of deliberate and set purpose, in all Christian congregations, as well as in families, and in the closet. Upon every individual believer this duty is incumbent, by the will and command of the Lord Jesus.

Yet, after all, in nothing is the providence of God, with respect to the church, more manifestly displayed than in the ministry with which it is supplied, especially in those sections of it where Christian godliness is maintained in its life and power, and the Gospel is preached in its purity and fulness. We speak not now of those churches which have "a name that they live, and are dead." The ministry which God provides for His spiritual church is powerful and effective, and embodies an endless variety of talent, adapted to the diversified wants of mankind.

Some ministers excel in biblical scholarship, and have a singular aptitude in bringing out the true meaning of God's word, to the delight and edification of their hearers. The sermons of other men are particularly suited to alarm the consciences of sinners, and extort from them the inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" Some preachers are remarkable for tenderness of feeling, and are eminently successful in bringing penitent sinners to their Saviour, and in comforting such as "mourn in Zion." They are "sons of consolation," rather than "sons of thunder." Some ministers are specially qualified to speak of "the deep things of God," successfully urging believers to "go on unto perfection," and seek to be "filled with all the fulness of God." Others excel in argument. They can refute error, and defend truth with such clearness and force of reasoning as to carry conviction even to prejudiced and erring minds.

Some ministers are the most useful in pastoral visitation, and in dealing with *individuals* in matters of salvation and duty. They have a particular aptitude for organizing churches, and directing the energies of other persons, so as to make them instrumental in advancing the cause of Christ. Other ministers are the most successful in dealing with children and young persons, bringing them into a state of happy intercourse with Christ, and training them to habits of piety and virtue. Some ministers, filled with the love of Christ, longing to extend the honour of His name, bold and enterprising in their spirit, are not only willing to carry the Gospel to the heathen, but even to heathens in a savage state, whose soil has never been pressed by the foot of a missionary, and where the name of Christ was never heard ; saying to Him whom their hearts adore,

“ My life, my blood, I here present,  
If for Thy truth it may be spent.”

In the raising up of men to meet the particular emergencies of the church we also recognise the providence of God in beautiful harmony with the operations of His grace. The history of the Protestant Reformation supplies an example. At that time the doctrines of Christianity were thoroughly corrupted, and the simple form of Christian worship, practised in the apostolic times, was superseded by the superstitious ceremonial of the Papacy. The Gospel method of salvation through faith in Christ was forgotten, and men were taught to expect salvation through self-inflicted penances, priestly absolution, and the mediation of saints and angels, of which the word of God knows nothing. Who can forbear to acknow-

ledge the good hand of God in raising up such men as Luther and Melancthon in Germany, of Zwingle and Calvin in Switzerland, of Knox in Scotland, and of Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, and Hooper in England, to bear their testimony against these fearful evils, and call the attention of mankind to New Testament Christianity, from which there was an almost universal departure? "Godlike-men, how firm they stood!" each of them with his hand upon his Bible, trusting in God, unmoved by the fulminations of "the triple tyrant," before whom even kings and emperors were accustomed to quail; but to whom these noble confessors "gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the Gospel might continue with" all who were able to estimate its value. In respect of scriptural Christianity, the Protestant Reformation was "life from the dead." It has impressed a new character upon many European nations, as well as upon Christian communities; and its beneficial effects are felt at the extremities of the globe.

At a later period, when in England the Christian profession had to a great extent become a matter of mere form, and when in many quarters even the form was renounced, and the people were fast verging towards a heathen state, it pleased God to raise up the two Wesleys, and their intrepid friend and fellow-labourer Whitefield, to sound the trumpet of alarm through the land, proclaiming everywhere, and to all classes of people, that no man is a true Christian but he that is born again; and that without this mighty change,—a change from sin to holiness,—every one must perish for ever. The benefits that have resulted from their labours

are incalculable, and are manifest in all evangelical communities at home and abroad.

Who does not perceive in all this variety of talent and of Christian effort a beautiful display of the providence and grace of God? It is His providence that gives men their peculiarities of character, adapting them to particular kinds of service; and it is His grace that gives a right direction to their energies, and a willingness to devote every talent they possess to the glory of their Saviour.

Other classes of men there are who have an aptitude for labour of a different kind, yet tending to the same end. Christian authorship, for example, presents an impressive manifestation of the providence of God. Some men who excel in the use of the pen are particularly drawn to write books of practical divinity, exhibiting Christian privilege in all its richness, and Christian duty in all its details; so that the followers of Christ in both these respects "may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." Other writers defend revealed truth, in opposition to the cavils and speculations of sceptics and unbelievers, and to the various forms of heretical opinion. Others, again, like Dr. Watts and Charles Wesley, employ their talents in the composition of hymns and spiritual songs, to aid Christian people in the devotions of the closet, of the family, and of the sanctuary: while other men, differently gifted, set these compositions to music, and produce melodies which nourish devout feeling, and thus prepare the members of the church for the sublimer worship of heaven, where saints and angels join in songs that never end. All these diversified gifts are to be ascribed to the good

providence of God ; and to the right application of them the parties possessing them are drawn and stimulated by His grace ; for, in respect of everything that is wise, holy, and beneficial, He worketh all in all.

God's providential care of His ministers is a subject to which great prominence is given in the New Testament. When our Saviour sent forth His disciples without property to preach His Gospel, He took care to provide for them ; so that after their return, He inquired, "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything ? And they said, Nothing." (Luke xxii. 35.) As the Jewish priests, who were employed in the performance of sacrificial rites, were "partakers with the altar, even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel ;" (1 Cor. ix. 13, 14;) and so "live" by it, as to be "given to hospitality ;" (1 Tim. iii. 2;) having something to spare for charitable purposes.

Means are also used by God to preserve them from all undue elation in consequence of their gifts and success. Lest St. Paul "should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations" vouchsafed to him, there was given to him "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure." This case of personal discipline was deemed so necessary, that the apostle could not obtain the removal of it even by earnest prayer, thrice repeated. (2 Cor. xii. 7-9.)

The sufferings to which St. Paul and his brethren in the ministry were subjected were designed by God to enable them more effectually to discharge their official duties with respect to the suffering members of the

church ; and the spiritual comfort imparted to them was intended to answer the same purpose. "Blessed be God," "who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." "And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation;" "or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation." (2 Cor. i. 3-6.)

In the midst of popular tumults, raised by men who were hostile to the Gospel, St. Paul ascribed his preservation, and that of his fellow-labourers, to the providence of God, though human means were sometimes employed. "We would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver." (2 Cor. i. 8-10.)

When the apostle was imprisoned, he expected his deliverance in answer to prayer, and therefore by the interposition of God. "Remember my bonds," said he to the Colossians; (Col. iv. 18;) and at the same time, addressing Philemon, who belonged to the same church, he said, "Prepare me a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you." (Philemon 22.)

He expected and obtained preservation from the murderous violence of persecuting Jews and heathens in answer to prayer; and therefore from the guardian

hand of God. "I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake," "that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea." (Rom. xv. 30, 31.) "Brethren, pray for us;" "that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men." (2 Thess. iii. 1, 2.) "Thou hast fully known" the "persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra;" "but out of them all the Lord delivered me." (2 Tim. iii. 10, 11.)

The apostles were directed by God as to the places where they should preach; and they surrendered themselves to His providential guidance. "When I came to Troas to preach Christ's Gospel, a door was opened to me of the Lord." (2 Cor. ii. 12.) "A vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us." "Immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the Gospel unto them." (Acts xvi. 9, 10.)

The truth is, the apostles and their associates in the Gospel ministry, having received their qualifications and commission from God, discharged all their official duties as in His immediate presence, and under the inspection of His eye. "In the sight of God speak we in Christ;" (2 Cor. ii. 17;) "commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God;" (2 Cor. iv. 2;) "who hath made us able ministers of the New Testament." (2 Cor. iii. 6.) The hand of God removed obstructions out of the way in different countries, so that His word might have "free course, and be

glorified ;" (2 Thess. iii. 1;) and He disposed the people to a meek and believing reception of the truth. "The Lord opened the heart of Lydia," so that she "attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul." (Acts xvi. 14.) He rendered their ministry successful; and they gave to Him the glory of all the good that was effected by their labours. "The hand of the Lord was with them," wherever they went; and in various cities "a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord;" (Acts xi. 21;) and hence their tone of gratitude and confidence : "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place." (2 Cor. ii. 14.) "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." (2 Cor. iv. 7.) Such is God's care of His ministers, a care which will end only with time, when their office and work will cease, according to the Saviour's promise : "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." (Matt. xxviii. 20.)

God is observant of the conduct of every man, but especially of the conduct of His ministers, who are to teach by their example, as well as by their public discourses. They stand in a near relation to God, and therefore His regard for them is special. They sustain under Him momentous trusts, and the everlasting interests of redeemed men depend upon their fidelity. They are "stars in the right hand" of Christ; (Rev. ii. 1;) they are "workers together" with God in the great concern of human salvation; (2 Cor. vi. 1;) He will therefore not fail to punish with terrible severity those who hinder them in the fulfilment of their high

commission: neither will He spare them that prove faithless in His service. "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works." "He hath greatly withheld our words;" "our preachings," as the marginal rendering is. (2 Tim. iv. 14, 15.) Of the "minister" and "steward" in the church of God, who loses his piety, forfeits his commission, quarrels with his fellow-servants, and indulges himself in acts of intemperance, it is said, that "the Lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for Him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers." (Luke xii. 46.)

The maintenance and extension of the church are not made to depend exclusively upon its ministers; its private members, both male and female, being, in their several degrees, instrumental in promoting its interests. They support the ministry by their pecuniary contributions, in accordance with the appointment of Christ, (1 Cor. ix. 4-12,) and the example of His early followers; (2 Cor. xi. 9;) they build Christian sanctuaries; they provide for the education of children, for the training of ministers, the circulation of the Holy Scriptures, the spread of the Gospel among the heathen, and of evangelical knowledge generally; they exhibit the real nature and value of religion by their example, and thus win sinners to Christ; and not a few of them are successfully employed in the direct communication of Gospel truth, not only in their own families, but in a more public manner, under the church's sanction. The Christians generally, when banished from Jerusalem by persecution, "went abroad everywhere preaching

the word ;” (Acts viii. 4;) and the apostles found in godly women valuable auxiliaries in the advancement of the cause of Christ, especially by teaching persons of their own sex. Priscilla is mentioned by St. Paul with special honour, in connexion with her excellent husband, as a helper in the Gospel ; (Acts xviii. 26; 1 Cor. xvi. 19;) and to Tryphena and Tryphosa, probably two sisters, the same apostle sent his salutations, as persons who “laboured in the Lord,” and to “the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord.” (Rom. xvi. 12.) At Philippi, Lydia not only received the truth herself, but hospitably entertained Paul and Silas, when in the fulfilment of their evangelical mission they visited that heathen city. In writing to the Philippian church, St. Paul says, “Help those women which laboured with me in the Gospel ;” (Phil. iv. 3;) so that Lydia was not the only woman there whom the apostle found to be helpful in his great work. In every age of the church godly women have been among its most useful members, being qualified by the providence and grace of God to promote its extension and spirituality.

Some of the Israelitish kings were men of piety, and a means of great religious benefit to the Hebrew church ; even heathen monarchs conferred favours upon the people of God, when the time of their return from the Babylonian captivity arrived, as we are distinctly informed in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah ; and with respect to the Christian church, when God would set up His standard among the Gentiles, it was said, “Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers :” (Isai. xlxi. 23 :) a prediction

which has been already in part verified ; and the truth of which will doubtless more fully appear in future ages, when the Gospel with its benefits and blessings shall be more extensively known.

God's providential care of the church is not confined to its ministers, and to persons of distinction, but extends to all its members, especially to those who "live in the Spirit," and "walk in the Spirit." (Gal. v. 25.) They are His adopted children, His elect ; He is not ashamed to be called their God, nor is Christ ashamed to call them His "brethren." To them are not only all spiritual blessings secured by express promise, but also such an amount of temporal enjoyments as will accord with their spiritual and eternal interests. In their case adversity and worldly prosperity, ease and pain, health and sickness, are alike beneficial ; for "all things work together for good to them that love God." (Rom. viii. 28.) "Tribulation worketh patience ; and patience, experience ; and experience, hope ;" (Rom. v. 3, 4;) and the light and momentary affliction by which they are exercised "worketh for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." (2 Cor. iv. 17.) Even in times of the severest persecution the faithful servant of Christ "may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." (Heb. xiii. 6.) "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," is the gracious promise of Christ to every believer in Him ; and His presence is at once the security and the happiness of all true believers, whether they are on the bed of mortal sickness, in the lone dungeon, or bound to the martyr's stake. The providence of their Lord will

attend them till their sanctified spirits enter into the heavenly paradise ; and will watch over their slumbering dust, till they shall awake to a sight of Christ upon His throne, and to the full enjoyment of the beatific vision.

We have said that the church of God, usually called the catholic or universal church, is composed of innumerable distinct communities, spread over the islands and continents of the earth, some of which comprehend many people, and others very few. The fact that they belong to the catholic church does not depend upon their submission to any particular form of church order, but upon their union with Christ, effected and maintained by a vital faith in Him. "He that hath the Son hath life ;" and therefore belongs to the holy fraternity whom God will for ever own : but "he that hath not the Son of God hath not life," (1 John v. 12,) whatever may be his profession, his creed, or the system of ecclesiastical order to which he conforms.

To all the distinct communities which constitute the church of God, the guardianship, inspection, and control of His providence are extended, as is manifest from the epistles which St. John addressed, at the dictation of our Saviour, to the seven churches in Asia, and are recorded in the second and third chapters of the Apocalypse. Among these churches the Son of God was said to "walk," observing not only their outward behaviour, but their spirit and temper ; and He says, "All the churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts." (Rev. ii. 23.) What is good He observes, approves, commends, and promises to reward ; what is evil He reproves with just severity, threatening to inflict punishment upon the offenders,

unless they take the warnings that He gives them, and that in the spirit of humiliation and submission. Religious declension, the loss of the first love, anti-Christian error in doctrine, immoral practice, He directly specifies, calling the guilty parties to repentance; and in case of perseverance in evil, He threatens to forsake them altogether, and remove the candlestick out of its place. He mentions with marks of special approval those who maintain their fidelity to Him in the midst of faithless brethren, and in times of severe trial; as the "few names in Sardis, who had not defiled their garments," and the "faithful martyr" Antipas, who was gone to his eternal rest. To every church, and to every individual member of every church, He says, "I know thy works."

Nor ought we ever to forget, that "judgment begins at the house of God." (1 Peter iv. 17.) Some members of the church at Corinth, by a profane abuse of the Lord's supper,—rendering that most sacred ordinance a means of intemperance, and of fomenting a spirit of faction,—so offended the Lord Christ, that they either died under His hand, or were afflicted with various forms of disease. (1 Cor. xi. 30.) Many churches, once large and flourishing, having departed from essential truth, have gradually fallen into lukewarmness, formality, worldliness, and sin, till they actually disappeared: for unfaithful Christians, cherishing a love of sin and error, are righteously abandoned to these evils, just as the Jews and heathens have been. St. Paul has recorded an awful prophecy to this effect. He describes an extensive apostasy which would take place among professed Christians, who received not the love of the truth,

that they might be saved. "And for this cause," he says, "God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." (2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.) On the other hand, when Christian churches walk in truth and purity, an assurance is given them that "the God of love and peace shall be with them." (2 Cor. xiii. 11.) "He careth" for them; and therefore they are authorized to cast all their care upon Him; (1 Peter v. 7;) and an apostle asks, "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" (1 Peter iii. 13.)

It is natural to inquire, if such is the tender care of God for the Christian church, how is it that He has suffered it to be persecuted, in one place or another, at every period of its existence, and often with terrible severity? Its members have often been treated as "the offscouring of the earth," and their blood has been shed like water. For three hundred years Christianity was a persecuted religion in the Roman empire; and during this period all who assumed the public profession of it did so at the hazard of their lives. But the severest persecutions of all are those which the papal community has inflicted. Her character and history are written in blood, as the doings of her Inquisition in Italy, Spain, and Portugal, her wars of extermination against the Vaudois, her horrid massacres in France and the Netherlands, and the burnings of Smithfield, loudly declare. How are these sad and appalling facts to be reconciled with the tender care of an Almighty Providence exercised towards the sufferers? To this inquiry we answer,—

1. That the Divine Author of Christianity declared beforehand that His followers would be a persecuted people, and called upon all who proposed to surrender themselves to Him, to count the cost, and prepare for such treatment. "Ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake." (Luke xxi. 17.) "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you." (Matt. xxiv. 9.) "Whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." (John xvi. 2.) The persecution of Christians then is no casualty. It was known at the beginning, and provided for. An apostle confirmed the testimony of our Lord, by declaring, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" in one form or another. (2 Tim. iii. 12.)

2. The truth and Divine authority of Christianity are confirmed by the persecutions which its witnesses and adherents have endured. The witnesses of Christ's resurrection, and of His other miracles, sealed their testimony with their blood, and thus gave the strongest possible proof of their truthfulness and integrity. The men and women who endure the most irritating insults and cruel tortures with meekness and resignation, expressing the purest benevolence towards their persecutors, and rejoicing in hope of heaven, give proof of a power more than human, a spirit heavenly and Divine. It follows then that Christianity is no device of kings, intended to keep their subjects in awe; nor is it a scheme invented by priests, for the purpose of securing their selfish ends. It is heaven-descended. Its doctrines are the very truth of God, and the grace by which they are applied to the hearts of individual men is the grace of the Holy Spirit. In the early ages of Chris-

tianity it therefore became a proverbial saying, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." The behaviour of the Christians when suffering martyrdom convinced heathen spectators of the power and blessedness of the religion for which these people suffered and died; so that in the midst of persecution Christianity not only maintained its ground, but steadily advanced, till, in the fourth century of its existence, it ascended the throne of the Cæsars. If the Christians were not a majority in the empire, they were deemed sufficiently numerous to support the imperial throne; and Constantine, who occupied it, assumed the Christian profession. The growth of Christianity was not impeded, but rather promoted, by the persecutions which its professors endured.

3. Persecution served as a test of character. It separated from the church persons who had nothing of Christianity but the name; and it gave the sincere members the means of demonstrating the genuineness of their faith, and the fervour of their love to Christ. To the persecuted disciples of his Lord St. Peter therefore said, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." (1 Peter iv. 12, 13.) To the same effect our blessed Lord has said, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice,

and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven." (Matt. v. 10-12.) The sufferings of martyrs are brief, but the rewards of martyrdom are endless; so that suffering for Christ's sake in this world is no valid objection against the goodness of Divine providence. Viewed in connexion with the rewards of heaven, even martyrdom is a privilege and a blessing; and the continued existence of the church through ages of wasting persecution is a demonstrative proof that it is guarded and sustained by an almighty power. To "the noble army of martyrs" a special and appropriate reward will be assigned by Christ, for whose sake they laid down their lives.

4. It must not, however, be forgotten, that persecution on account of religion, and especially on account of the Christian religion, considered in itself, is a great and flagrant sin against both God and man, though overruled for good by infinite wisdom and mercy. It is a usurpation of God's authority,—for He only has dominion over the conscience,—and an encroachment upon the most sacred rights of human nature. A fearful reckoning therefore awaits all who have slain the servants of Christ, or have otherwise injured them, on account of their subjection to Him, under whatever pretence the deed may have been perpetrated. "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you." (2 Thess. i. 6.) The greatest persecuting power that ever existed in the world is mystic "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth," who has her seat upon the "seven mountains." Her doom is sealed. She is "drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of

Jesus," and must answer for all that she has done. (Rev. xvii. 5, 6, 9.) Terrible is the cry of innocent blood. "I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev. vi. 9, 10.) That "loud voice," we have reason to believe, is still heard; and the day of retribution is hastening on, when righteous punishment will be inflicted upon persecutors, and an ample reward be conferred upon God's faithful witnesses. In the meanwhile, the church exists in undiminished numbers, and is in course of rapid extension in heathen lands, a perpetual monument of God's faithfulness and guardian care.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE RETRIBUTIONS OF PROVIDENCE.

THERE is a direct and established connexion between sin and punishment; for “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” (Rom. i. 18.) Provision is indeed made by the sacrifice of the cross for the forgiveness of the most heinous offences, and for the full and free justification of even the “ungodly:” but if that provision be neglected, the just penalty of sin will most certainly be inflicted; for “He is righteous that taketh vengeance.” The full punishment of sin is reserved for a future state. It is in the day of judgment that the secrets of all hearts will be disclosed, the real character and conduct of every man declared, and a righteous doom awarded. Every sentence then pronounced will be irreversible; for the judgment of that day will be “eternal judgment.” (Heb. vi. 2.)

Yet the entire punishment of sin is not in every instance reserved for a future state. In this life we often see it inflicted upon the guilty. Expulsion from the garden of Eden immediately followed the first transgression; the old world, abandoned to profligacy and irreligion, was destroyed by the general deluge; and “the cities of the plain” perished miserably, by fire

from heaven, as a warning to all that might be tempted to offend in the same manner.

Many examples are recorded in Holy Scripture of punishment inflicted upon individual offenders, and even upon families and communities : and the correspondence between the sin committed, and the punishment that followed, is often so manifest as to produce an impression upon every reflecting mind, that, whatever a subtle scepticism may suggest to the contrary, “verily He is a God that judgeth in the earth.” (Psalm lviii. 11.) Cases of this kind abound in the sacred writings ; and to some of these we will now direct our attention.

In what manner Cain, the murderer of Abel, ended his days, we know not ; but that his life was a life of misery the sacred narrative plainly declares. He was doomed to be “a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth ;” the ground that he cultivated would not yield to him the produce which it yielded to other men ; he therefore lived upon charity ; and laboured under a continual apprehension that some one would slay him. His days were consequently spent in terror ; for he had a guilty conscience, and the curse of God rested upon him. (Gen. iv. 11-14.) In a subsequent age the decree of God went forth, “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed.” (Gen. ix. 6.) When Cain committed his fearful crime, the government of the world was patriarchal. Adam, under God, possessed the supreme authority ; and supposing him to be truly penitent, and reconciled to God, we can easily believe that God would spare the father the pain of passing the sentence of death upon his own son, and that son his

firstborn, great as was the crime of which he was guilty. Be this as it may, Cain was left to die “a living death.” The retributions of Providence vary, with respect to their severity, according to the nature of the offences of which they are the punishment. We can scarcely conceive of a state more wretched than that of Cain, as he has himself described it. Such, by the just judgment of God, are the bitter fruits of sin!

Rebekah, anxious to secure the honour of her favourite son Jacob, persuaded him to utter a deliberate falsehood to his aged and blind father. The consequence was, that he was immediately severed from the family; and the probability is, that she never saw him again till they met in the world of spirits. (Gen. xxvii. 6-13.)

Jacob willingly consented to practise a mean and dishonourable fraud upon Isaac, by feigning himself to be Esau; and two cruel frauds were practised upon him in the subsequent years of his life. The first, by his uncle Laban, who gave him as his wife Leah, instead of Rachel; and the second by his own sons, who presented to him the coat of Joseph besmeared with blood, saying that they had found it in that state, when they had dipped it in blood themselves, and sold the unfortunate owner of it into the hands of strangers. (Gen. xxix. 23-25; xxxvii. 31-35.) “With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” (Matt. vii. 2.)

Readers of the Mosaic narrative are so charmed with the honours and advancement of Joseph, and the public benefit of which he was the occasion, that they are apt

to overlook the misery which the sin of his brethren entailed upon them. When they sold him into the hands of strangers they witnessed "the anguish of his soul," and committed a great sin. That sin and the "anguish" it caused they never forgot, and never could forget. He doubtless implored their forbearance, and begged that they would allow him to return to his father. After the lapse of some twenty-two years they found themselves in circumstances of difficulty and peril in the country to which he was forcibly taken; and then the first thought that occurred to their minds was the retributive providence of God, entering into judgment with them for that wicked act, and the cruelty which it involved. They needed no outward monitor. Under the upbraiding of an evil conscience, "they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us." (Gen. xlvi. 21.) What must they have felt upon a subsequent occasion, when the man who stood before them as the viceroy of Egypt, and had hitherto treated them in a stern and repulsive manner, after hearing a pathetic speech from Judah concerning his aged father, "wept aloud," and "said unto his brethren, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt?" It is no wonder that "his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence." Perceiving their excited feelings, and knowing how anxious they would be to clear themselves, and lay the blame of their misconduct upon each other, he said, on dismissing them, "See that ye fall not out by the way." (Gen. xlvi. 24.) But what words

can describe the scene that must have taken place in the tent of Jacob, when his sons arrived at home, and reported to him, "Joseph is yet alive, and is governor over all the land of Egypt?" Then the sad fact as to the manner in which he came into Egypt could no longer be concealed, with the heartless fraud they had practised upon their aged and pensive father for more than twenty years: for the mystery of the bloody coat they had now to explain. While "the old man" was shedding tears of gratitude, and others of the family were shouting for joy at the unexpected intelligence, confirmed by the sight of the waggons that Joseph had sent, we cannot but conceive of the guilty men as pale with terror, covered with shame, and filled with remorse, shrinking into solitude, and in effect saying as they went, "The way of transgressors is hard." (Prov. xiii. 15.)

Years passed away, and at length the sorrows of Jacob ended in a peaceful death: but then the sorrows of his guilty sons were renewed. When they "saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him." How to avert this dreaded calamity was now their concern. They knew the profound respect that Joseph had for his father while living, and for his memory now that he was dead; and therefore sent "a messenger" to him, "saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father." The men, it would

appear, were ashamed and afraid themselves to prefer this request, and therefore delivered it by "a messenger ;" and further to insure success, they not only state that they made it in compliance with their father's command, but also profess to be the "servants" of their father's God. Whether Jacob had given this command, and whether these men had indeed assumed a truly religious character when they made this profession, we know not; but they were reduced to great straits, being at the mercy of a man whom they had once agreed to murder, and had afterwards sold for a slave. On receiving this message, Joseph "wept :" and his brethren, having thus far succeeded, "also went and fell down before his face ; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants :" and he, with his characteristic kindness and generosity, said, "Fear ye not : I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them." (Gen. 1. 15-21.)

Such are the bitter consequences of sin. There was a time when these proud men could not bear the recital of Joseph's dreams ; but they have now forfeited their independence, and appear before their own brother, junior to many of them, in the attitude of crouching slaves. They "would not hear him," when in "the anguish of his soul" he besought their compassion ; and now, prostrate before him, they beseech him to spare their lives. By a sinful act, committed in an evil hour, they made themselves miserable, by bringing an intolerable load of guilt upon their consciences ; and their feeling of self-degradation ended only with their lives. Such are the retributions of God. The consequences of sin, even when hastily committed, often

follow a man to his grave,—to say nothing of the coming judgment, the decisions of which will be still more terrible.

When Pharaoh could not prevail upon the midwives in Egypt to kill the male children of the Israelites as soon as they were born ; being still bent upon their destruction, he “ charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river.” (Exod. i. 22.) Ere long the king, with the vast armies at his command, perished in the same manner. Pursuing the tribes of Israel through the channel of the Red Sea, “the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them ; there remained not so much as one of them.” (Exod. xiv. 28.) “ Then sang Moses and the children of Israel, The depths have covered them : they sank into the bottom as a stone.” (Exod. xv. 1, 5.)

Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, having been consecrated to the priest’s office, were not careful to worship God in the manner He had prescribed. Regardless of His command, they “ offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not.” Their punishment corresponded with their sin. “ There went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord ;” “ and Aaron held his peace ;” feeling that the judgment was righteously inflicted. (Lev. x. 1-3.) It is probable that when these unhappy men offered this daring affront to God, lighting their censers perhaps from their own hearths, they were in a state of intoxication ; for immediately after the occurrence of this sad case, God gave the command to Aaron, “ Do not drink wine nor strong

*drink, thou nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die : it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations.”\**

The Levites who were confederate with Korah and his company in rebellion against God, and were resolved to usurp the priest’s office in opposition to the Divine command, were punished in the same manner. “They took every man his censer, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation with Moses and Aaron,” claiming an equality with them. “And there came out a fire from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.” (Num. xvi. 18, 35.)

The case of Adonibezek is very remarkable. He was one of the kings of Canaan, who fell into the hands of the people of Israel, in the fulfilment of God’s commission to exterminate a race whose iniquity was now full, after ages of the Divine forbearance. Instead of putting him to death at once, they cut off his thumbs and great toes, and suffered him to live a while longer. Why they tortured him in this manner is not stated; and perhaps they themselves hardly knew. They appear to have been unconsciously the instruments of a righteous Providence. And heathen as he was, stricken in his own conscience, he confessed to the men who thus treated him, that he had no just ground of complaint. “And Adonibezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered

\* Blunt’s “Undesigned Coincidences in the Old and New Testament,” p. 61. Edit. 1847. See also the works of Dr. Graves, vol. ii., pp. 66, 67. Edit. 1840.

their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died." (Judges i. 7.) This is not the only instance in which we find, even in the heathen mind, the recognition of a power which takes summary vengeance upon evil doers, and especially upon those who are addicted to acts of cruelty. When "the barbarous people" at Melita saw St. Paul bound with a chain, and a viper fastened on his hand,—knowing the effect of the viper's bite, and not knowing the apostle's character, but perceiving that he was a prisoner, they concluded that he had committed murder; and that therefore "vengeance suffered him not to live," "though he had escaped" the perils of "the sea." (Acts xxviii. 4.) Such is the power of conscience even in an untutored mind.

Abimelech, one of the sons of Gideon, after the death of his father, aspired to the supreme authority in Israel; and for the attainment of this ambitious object "slew his brethren," the sons of his own father, "threescore and ten persons, upon one stone." This atrocious act was soon followed by its appropriate penalty. For "God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem," who had been confederate with him; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech; "that the cruelty done" to the murdered men might be avenged. "A certain woman cast a millstone upon Abimelech's head, and all to break his skull. Then he called hastily unto his armourbearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him. And his young man thrust him through, and he died." "Thus God rendered the

wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren." (Judges ix. 5-56.)

The case of Agag appears to have borne a near resemblance to that of Adonibezek. He was the king of the Amalekites, a people whose extermination God had decreed ; and it would seem that he partook largely of the quarrelsome and bloody character of the people over whom he reigned. Saul forfeited his crown mainly by his unfaithfulness with respect to these degenerate people, whom God resolved no longer to endure. Samuel, as the minister of God's will, said to this effeminate perpetrator of deeds of blood, "As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal." (1 Sam. xv. 33.)

After a strange career of perverseness and folly, Saul himself died in dishonour and misery, a warning to his successors in the kingly office. He ordered in one day the execution of " fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod. And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings," not one of whom had been guilty of any crime. (1 Sam. xxii. 18, 19.) After relating these atrocious murders, and other deeds of the same kind, the inspired narrative continues, " So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it ; and inquired not of the Lord : therefore He slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse." (1 Chron. x. 13, 14.)

The sin of David, in the matter of Uriah, was

attended by special aggravations, and punished by judgments of awful severity. He was laid under the strongest obligations to a life of holiness, by the kingly office which he sustained, and the consequent influence of his character ; by the signal honours which God had conferred upon him ; by the spiritual gifts with which he was endowed, especially that of inspiration ; and by the promises which were made to him with respect to his posterity, among whom was to be the Christ of God. Yet, in violation of all these ties, he defiled the wife of a brave soldier, then engaged in the service of the country; and, to conceal his own sin, he deliberately contrived the death of the injured man. “ But the thing that David did displeased the Lord ;” (2 Sam. xi. 27;) and punishment was not long delayed. It was said to him in the name of Almighty God, “ Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword ;” “ now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house.” “ Thou hast taken his wife to be thy wife ;” and “ I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour.” “ Thou didst it secretly : but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.” (2 Sam. xii. 9-12.)

These terrible threatenings, uttered by the prophet Nathan, were fulfilled to the very letter. Within about three or four years, Amnon, one of David’s sons, was treacherously murdered by the command of Absalom, who had invited him to a feast ; and, within three or four years more, Absalom raised a rebellion against his father’s government ; the nation was thrown into a state of disorder ; a civil war broke out in his kingdom, with

its untold amount of crime and misery ; David was compelled to flee for his life ; the profligate Absalom, whom the father tenderly loved, was slain in the height of his wicked career. In this manner the royal offender was made deeply to feel that it is an evil and bitter thing to sin against God, to whom kings are accountable, as well as other men. The sin which David had committed, and hoped to conceal, was made known to the whole nation ; his own wives were publicly dishonoured ; his character sustained irreparable injury ; many of his subjects were alienated from him both in confidence and affection ; and although his sin was so far forgiven as not to be visited upon him in a future state, it was to the end of his life a subject of sorrowful remembrance ; and he had before him the prospect of perpetual disquiet in his own family.

When Absalom had invited his brother Amnon to a feast, he “commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Ammon’s heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon ; then kill him, fear not : have not I commanded you ? And the servants of Absalom did unto Ammon as Absalom had commanded.” (2 Sam. xiii. 28, 29.) The provocation which Absalom had received was indeed great ; but he had no just authority to take the life of his brother. The act was a murder, committed in a cowardly manner, under the mask of brotherly affection. The victim was invited to a feast, urged to a free use of wine, and then assassinated when he was under the influence of strong drink, and incapable of self-defence. Seven years afterwards, when Absalom, this vain and bloody murderer, was engaged in a wicked attempt to overthrow

his father's government, and get possession of his father's throne, he was caught between the branches of an oak tree, when riding upon a mule ; and, when he was unable to extricate himself, Joab, his own cousin, "took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak." (2 Sam. xviii. 14.) He slew his brother, and a near relation slew him. This act filled David with unutterable grief ; for the profligate young man died while violating the fifth commandment of God's holy law, and in this death David saw in part the punishment of his own sin.

Joab was the nephew of David. He was an able military commander, and a man of singular energy of character ; but self-willed, a dark assassin, and often a great trouble to David, who was unable either to control him or to get rid of him. The truth is, he was possessed of the dreadful secret of Uriah's murder, and therefore David was evidently afraid of him. Joab felt this, and often treated the king with marked disrespect, as if he were the sovereign, and David the subject. David himself was powerless before this imperious and bloody man ; but at the close of his life, when resigning his crown, he said to Solomon, "Thou knowest what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, and what he did to the two captains of the hosts of Israel, unto Abner the son of Ner, and unto Amasa the son of Jether, whom he slew, and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that was about his loins, and in his shoes that were on his feet. Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace." (1 Kings ii. 5, 6.) In

ordering the execution of this able but bad man, Solomon said, "Fall upon him, and bury him ; that thou mayest take away the innocent blood, which Joab shed, from me, and from the house of my father. And the Lord shall return his blood upon his own head, who fell upon two men more righteous and better than he, and slew them with the sword, my father David not knowing thereof." "So Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up, and fell upon him, and slew him : and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness." (1 Kings ii. 31-34.)

Jeroboam was the first king of the ten tribes of Israel after their separation from Judah and Benjamin. Lest his subjects should attend the worship of God in the temple at Jerusalem, according to the Mosaic law, and thus be drawn into their former subjection to "the house of David," he devised for them a system of idolatry, to which the people generally conformed. He is therefore often stigmatized in the sacred history as the man that "made Israel to sin." When he introduced his form of idolatrous worship he was faithfully warned by a prophet whom God sent to him, and whose ministry He confirmed by miracles. But Jeroboam was regardless alike of the authority of God, and of the religious interests of the people, and intent only upon the perpetuity of his secular dominion. Whether God was worshipped in the forms which He had Himself commanded or not, and whether the people were saved or lost, were to him matters of indifference. Nothing was important, in his estimation, but the establishment of his throne. Conduct more impious and immoral it is impossible to imagine. All the members of his house, with one exception, concurred with him in his evil deeds, and

shared in the punishment. Of this wicked family, it was therefore said, "Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat: for the Lord hath spoken it." (1 Kings xiv. 11.) The fulfilment of this terrible threatening is not recorded in the sacred history; but of its truth there can be no doubt. Of Jeroboam himself, the head of this bad family, it is significantly said, "The Lord struck him, and he died." (2 Chron. xiii. 20.)

Ahab, another king that reigned over the ten tribes, obtained special notoriety by his wickedness. He married Jezebel, a heathen princess; and they rivalled each other in their opposition to the truth, the people, and the worship of God. She "cut off the prophets of the Lord," and he "sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord." (1 Kings xviii. 4; xxi. 20.) He wished to possess a vineyard, which Naboth, the owner, refused to sell, because it was the family estate, given by God; and to alienate it would be an injury to others. Jezebel settled the matter by prevailing upon the people to murder him under a false charge of her own invention. In this manner Ahab obtained possession of the vineyard; but when he went to claim it as his own, he received a terrible message from God, delivered by Elijah the prophet. "Thus saith the Lord," was the fearful announcement, "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine." "And of Jezebel also spake the Lord, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel." (1 Kings xxi. 19, 23.) At the same time it was declared that the whole of Ahab's family should be speedily cut off.

On receiving this message Ahab was alarmed, and humbled himself before God. The consequence was, that his family was respite for a time; but within two years he was himself mortally wounded in a battle with the Syrians. The man that killed him, it is said, "drew his bow at a venture;" but an unerring Providence directed it to a vital part of the guilty king, so that it pierced "between the joints of the harness:" "and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot." "So the king died, and was brought to Samaria." "And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armour; according unto the word of the Lord which He spake." (1 Kings xxii. 34-38.)

Jezebel was spared about nine years longer, but her end was still more tragical. She was thrown out of an upper window, where she exhibited herself with her face painted, and her finest head-dress. She was killed by the fall, trampled upon by the crowd, and nearly the whole of her remains were devoured by dogs. "This is the word of the Lord, which He spake by His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel." (2 Kings ix. 33-36.) Ahab had a numerous family, the whole of whom were slain about the same time; the task of executing upon them the Divine threatening being assigned to Jehu. (2 Kings ix. 7.)

Gehazi was the servant of the prophet Elisha, and therefore had every means of religious instruction, warning, and encouragement. In his master he had an example of the strictest purity and uprightness; and he often witnessed, in connexion with his master's ministry,

even miraculous displays of Divine power. It may therefore be fairly doubted whether any man then living had better means for obtaining a saving knowledge of God, or was supplied with more powerful motives to an obedient and holy life. But he appears to have remained worldly in his disposition, dissatisfied with his providential lot, wishful to become a man of property, and regardless of truth. Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, who was afflicted with that dreadful disease, the eastern leprosy, received an instantaneous cure under the direction of Elisha, but he tried in vain to persuade the man of God to accept a sum of money as an acknowledgment of the benefit. Perceiving that Naaman was liberally inclined, Gehazi followed the distinguished stranger, and by the utterance of a deliberate falsehood obtained such an amount of silver as it required two men to carry, with two changes of raiment. When his master inquired where he had been, he denied that he had gone anywhere; but the prophet gave ample proof that the whole of the fraudulent transaction had been revealed to him by the Spirit of God, together with the ambitious workings of Gehazi's heart. The sin was great. A fraud was practised upon an unsuspecting stranger in the name of God's prophet: and a falsehood was not only uttered to Naaman, but to Elisha, of whose inspiration the most decisive proof had been given; as if Gehazi meant to "tempt the Spirit of the Lord." The sin of Gehazi resembled that of Ananias and Sapphira. He "lied not unto men" only, "but unto God." (Acts v. 4.) Under a Divine impulse Elisha said to his faithless servant, "The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy

seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." (2 Kings v. 20-27.) In this sad case the judgment of God immediately followed the sin : yet it was mixed with mercy. His life was spared ; so that space was given for repentance, in the exercise of which he might obtain forgiveness, and thus escape the wrath to come.

Jehoram, one of the kings of Judah, was a son of Jehoshaphat ; but he followed not the example of his godly father. He married a daughter of Ahab, one of the worst men that ever lived. On his elevation to the throne, he murdered his six brothers, the sons of his own father, besides other "princes of Israel," that they might not present any rival claims to the regal honours ; he set at nought the laws and ordinances that God had instituted among His own people ; and he gave direct encouragement to idolatry, with its abominable con-comitants, even in Jerusalem, the place where God had erected His temple and His throne. The consequence of all this wickedness was, that his kingdom was invaded, his property seized, his wives and children made captives, and himself doomed to die one of the most miserable of deaths. It was said to him, "Thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day." This threatening was literally fulfilled. Not only were his family and property taken from him ; but "after all this the Lord smote him in his bowels with an incurable disease. And it came to pass, that in process of time, after the end of two years, his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness : so he died of sore diseases. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning of his

fathers ; ” “ and he departed without being desired.” (2 Chron. xxi. 15–20.) Other members of his family followed his evil example, especially in the encouragement and practice of idolatry, and in the shedding of innocent blood. They perished in a wretched manner, and their names are branded with dishonour in the Scriptures of God. (2 Chron. xxii. 7–10 ; xxiii. 15 ; xxiv. 20–25.)

The personal history of Uzziah, another of the kings of Judah, is full of instruction and warning. He was young when he ascended the throne, and his reign was extended to fifty-two years. Contemporary with him was “ Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God ; ” and in the days of that wise and holy man, Uzziah “ sought God ; ” “ and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper.” He was eminently successful in his wars ; he strengthened the fortifications of Jerusalem ; he contrived warlike engines of great power, which he placed upon the walls of the city, to throw stones and arrows upon an invading foe ; he had a numerous and well-disciplined army ; he loved husbandry, and his agricultural operations were skilful and widely extended ; “ and his name spread far abroad ; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong.” His greatness was a snare to him ; for, “ when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction.” Regardless of God’s express command, he presumed to burn incense in the temple ; thus usurping an office which God had assigned exclusively to the priests of the house of Aaron. He was remonstrated with at the time, and warned of the danger ; but he was resolved to have his own way, was “ wroth ” with the men who

withstood him, and reminded him that he was violating the law of God. When he was in the very act of transgression, the leprosy appeared in his forehead ; so that the priests “thrust him out from thence ; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him. And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper ; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord.” (2 Chron. xxvi. 16–21.) He attempted, in a daring and presumptuous manner, to introduce a change in the worship which God had instituted in His own temple ; and into that temple he was never again allowed to enter.

The Mosaical form of Divine worship was thus strictly guarded, because the minutest parts of it were instituted by God, and ought therefore to be observed with the greatest caution in deference to His authority ; and because the whole of it was typical in its character. To alter it was to defeat its design, and deprive the people of the benefit to be derived from it. Even the ornaments of the tabernacle were all to be made according to the “pattern shown” to Moses “in the mount,” where he was alone with God ; (Exod. xxv. 40;) and much more was the form of worship appointed by God to be carefully observed.

To the destruction of the Assyrian army, when under the command of Sennacherib it laid siege to Jerusalem, we have already referred. The blasphemous language of that vain monarch, viewed in connexion with his miserable end, is worthy of special attention, as an instance of providential retribution. God is merciful, but jealous of His honour. Sennacherib “wrote letters to rail on the Lord God of Israel, and to speak against

Him, saying, As the gods of the nations of other lands have not delivered their people out of mine hand, so shall not the God of Hezekiah deliver His people out of mine hand." Immediately after the utterance of this impious and senseless boast, his army was cut off by the destroying angel. "So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he was come into the house of his god, they that came forth of his own bowels slew him there with the sword." (2 Chron. xxxii. 17, 21.)

Jeremiah foretold the Babylonian captivity, as the certain punishment of sin, and called upon the people belonging to the kingdom of Judah to repent in the prospect of that dire calamity. On this account he was treated with great severity by an ungodly people, who put far from them the evil day. Among his bitter persecutors was "Pashur the son of Immer the priest, who was also chief governor in the house of the Lord." He "smote Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks." "Then said Jeremiah unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will make thee a terror to thyself, and to all thy friends." "Thou, Pashur, and all that dwell in thine house shall go into captivity: and thou shalt come to Babylon, and there thou shalt die, and shalt be buried there, thou, and all thy friends, to whom thou hast prophesied lies." (Jer. xx. 1-6.) This bad man, sustaining a high office in the house of God, laboured with all his might to throw discredit upon the warnings and predictions of the prophet; and he himself was one of the principal sufferers in the captivity which Jeremiah foretold.

No man appears to have contradicted Jeremiah in a more hostile manner than Hananiah, who exerted him-

self in every possible way to produce a false confidence among the people when national judgments were immediately impending. "Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah, Hear now, Hananiah; The Lord hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord. So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month." (Jer. xxviii. 15-17.)

It would be difficult to find a more striking example of providential retribution than that of Haman, of whom we have an extended account in the Book of Esther. He appears to have belonged to the doomed race of Amalek, and to have freely indulged himself in that murderous hostility to the people of God for which his nation was remarkable. Having risen to a state of distinction in the court of Ahasuerus, the king of Persia, he formed a scheme for a general massacre of the Jews, then in helpless captivity; and had prepared a gallows fifty cubits high, on which he intended to hang Mordecai, who belonged to the Hebrew race, and refused to bow to this proud and malicious favourite. His bloody purposes were brought to light by means which clearly indicated the hand of God. The intended victims of his cruelty were spared; Haman himself was hanged upon "the gallows that he had prepared for" the execution of "Mordecai;" (Esther vii. 10;) and Mordecai was raised to the honourable position of the man who had contrived his death. "The Lord is known by the judgment which He

executeth : the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands." (Psalm ix. 16.)

The New Testament is eminently a revelation of God's grace and mercy to a ruined world, rich, free, and abounding. Yet it contains examples of providential retribution, which clearly prove that sin cannot be committed with impunity, and that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Jesus Christ did indeed by the grace of God "taste death for every man ;" but not that "every man," or any man, might live in sin; but that He might redeem mankind from the guilt, defilement, and curse of "all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works :" (Titus ii. 14:) and all who "neglect so great salvation," and especially all who place themselves in an attitude of opposition to its Author, shall feel the power of His avenging arm.

We have seen that Herod, who killed James the brother of John with the sword, and intended to slay Peter in the same manner, for the pleasure of the Jews, and who had the presumptuous daring to usurp Divine honours, died miserably under the hand of an angel. Ananias and Sapphira "agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord," by the utterance of a lie to the apostles, who acted avowedly under His direction, presuming that the Spirit could not detect the fraud ; and both of them died by the hand of God in the commission of this aggravated sin. "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." (Acts v. 1-11.) When Elymas the sorcerer openly withheld Paul and Barnabas in the exercise of their ministry, and sought to turn away Sergius Paulus from the faith, "Paul, filled with the Holy Ghost, set

his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand." (Acts xiii. 7-11.) In this case, as in many others, judgment was mixed with mercy. The blindness, it would appear, was only intended to remain "for a season;" and we may hope that under the calamitous visitation he would repent of his sin, and believe to the saving of his soul.

The facts which have now come before us show how hateful sin is in the sight of the God of purity, and how vain it is for men to hope that their evil deeds can be effectually concealed, and the punishment of them avoided. God witnesses the transgression of His law with just indignation; and He often brings to light secret wickedness in a manner which the guilty parties never suspected. Cain, Joseph's brethren, Achan, Gehazi, all attempted to conceal their sin; but their deep-laid schemes were all vain. No man, and no number of men, can successfully contend with God. His wisdom is too deep for human cunning; and what is a worm in the hand of Omnipotence? If the punishment of sin in this world, and during the day of grace, is often so terrible as we have seen; what will it be in a future state, when grace is for ever withdrawn, and wrath comes upon sinners to the uttermost? "The fear of the Lord," by which men are restrained from sin, "that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, is understanding."

## CHAPTER X.

## THE REMUNERATIONS OF PROVIDENCE.

IT is not in this world, but in the next, that righteousness receives its full and appropriate reward. To "the coming of the Lord" Christians are taught to look for the completion of their happiness. This is their seedtime; and they must not expect to "reap" till the time of harvest, which will arrive "in due season." At present they are called to "fight the good fight of faith;" and the promised "crown of glory" is reserved till the victory is won. Yet, as "some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment," "likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand;" and Almighty God is pleased, in various instances, to express His approval of His servants by favourable interpositions of His providence. Many examples of this kind are recorded in Holy Scripture; and to a few of them we may with propriety direct a brief attention.

In the antediluvian world Enoch was not only an eminent example of piety, but was also a faithful witness for God. Amidst the cares of a family, (for he had "sons and daughters,") for at least three hundred years he "walked with God;" and he prophesied of the coming of Christ to judgment. He did this in an age of abounding iniquity. Upon this upright and holy man was

conferred the signal favour of being translated to heaven without the pain and humiliation of dying ; so that in him was typified, at that early period of the world's history, the final glorification of God's people, both in body and soul : a consummation to which they shall all at length attain. (Gen. v. 22 ; Heb. xi. 5 ; Jude 14, 15.) We conceive of his translation as an expression of God's approval of distinguished piety, and as a confirmation of the doctrine of the future blessedness of the saints ; for with God there is no respect of persons ; so that all who in this world are equal to Enoch in piety shall in the world to come be equal to him in glory and blessedness.

Of Noah it is said that he "was a just man, and perfect in his generations ;" and that he also "walked with God." (Gen. vi. 9.) His character and conduct, thus described, were the more remarkable, because he lived in an age of general ungodliness and profligacy, and he had no religious companions but the few persons that composed his own family. "The wickedness of man was great in the earth ;" for "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." "The earth was filled with violence," and "all flesh had corrupted his way." (Gen. vi. 5-13.) Wickedness thus enormous, and diffused through the entire mass of the people, the Almighty resolved to punish by a general deluge. He "spared not the old world," but destroyed them with a flood. At the same time, He was mindful of the solitary family that feared and loved Him. He devised the ark as the means of their preservation ; He gave direction as to its size, and the mode of its construction ; He provided for the preserva-

tion of the various classes of animals then existing. When the ark was completed, and the fountains of the great deep about to be broken up, and the windows of heaven to be opened, "the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark ; for thee have I seen righteous before Me in this generation :" and, when they had entered, "the Lord shut him in." (Gen. vii. 1, 16.) What a series of providential interpositions ! When the silence of death reigned without, when nothing was to be seen above but dark clouds, charged with death, and nothing around but a wide world of waters, every tree and mountain having disappeared, Noah and his family floated in perfect safety under the guardian care of an almighty Providence, which had directed all their previous arrangements. Before they had finished their earthly course, they had demonstrative evidence that "in keeping the commandments" of God "there is great reward." The waters which drowned the world, supporting the ark, were the means of their preservation ; for all things serve the sovereign will of the great Creator. In this case, as in a thousand others, thoughtful men and holy angels "discern between the righteous and the wicked ; between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not."

The same care was extended to Lot, when another terrible judgment of God was inflicted upon a guilty people. "The cities of the plain" rivalled the antediluvian world in irreligion, to which they added a worse than brutal sensuality ; and were destroyed, not by an overwhelming flood of water, but by a shower of liquid fire ; which, while it consumed the people, left its impress upon the country, presenting a permanent warning to

wicked men. But when God "turned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes," "making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly," He "delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked :" (Gen. xix. 24-29 ; 2 Peter ii. 6, 7 :) a symbol of the final deliverance of the holy and upright, when all who have lived and died in sin shall be condemned to suffer "the vengeance of eternal fire." God's care of Lot was particularly kind and condescending. He sent two angels to give the requisite warning ; and He delayed the judgment till the favoured family had made their escape.

After Abraham had yielded a prompt obedience to the Divine command to offer his son Isaac to God as a burnt sacrifice, displaying a faith of unexampled power, and an absolute submission to the Almighty's will, he received from God a renewal of the promise that he should be the honoured head of a great and mighty nation, which for a series of ages should be God's chosen witness in the world, and of which Christ should be born, as the Author of "blessing" to all the ends of the earth. "By Myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son : that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore ; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies ; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed ; because thou hast obeyed My voice." (Gen. xxii. 16-18.) This most comprehensive promise, confirmed by the oath of God, was given in consequence of Abraham's submission to God's severe

requirement, and was a rich reward for all the mental conflict which as a father he must have felt when leading his son to the place of sacrifice, binding him with cords, laying the wood in order, and then taking the knife, intending to plunge it into the vitals of one who was bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. Abraham had no doubt that, in case Isaac should die in the manner commanded, he would be raised up again; so that the promise of a numerous issue by him would be infallibly fulfilled: yet as a man and a father he must have endured mental pangs unutterable, when with his own hand he was required to slay the son of his old age. (Heb. xi. 19.) The trial was severe, but his submission was entire. Men lose nothing, and gain much, by submission to their Maker's will. Abraham's obedience to God has secured to him honour wide as the world, and lasting as eternity.

The truth is, that the greatness of the Hebrew people is spoken of in Holy Scripture as consequent upon the parental conduct of this holy man. "For I know him," said God, "that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him." (Gen. xviii. 19.) After the death of Abraham the Lord appeared to Isaac, and said, "I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will multiply thy seed for My servant Abraham's sake." (Gen. xxvi. 24.) The honour that God has conferred upon Abraham, in approval of Abraham's character, and especially of Abraham's faith, is not limited to the natural descendants of the patriarch. It extends to the

Christian church ; for all believers, whether they be Jews or Gentiles by birth, are declared to be “ Abraham’s seed ; ” so that he is the father of all who are possessed of a vital and saving faith ; (Gal. iii. 29 ; Rom. iv. 11;) and of one of these his descendants it is said, that when he died he, “ was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom.” (Luke xvi. 22.) Such is the remunerative honour conferred by God upon Abraham, whom He denominated His “ servant ” and His “ friend.” (Isai. xli. 8.)

In some cases God has caused His special blessing to rest upon particular persons, their families, and property, as a token of His approval. Thus when Jacob, having faithfully served his uncle Laban for many years, expressed a desire to return to his own land, “ Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry : for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake.” To this proposal Jacob answered, “ It was little which thou hadst before I came, and it is now increased unto a multitude ; and the Lord hath blessed thee since my coming : and now when shall I provide for mine own house also ? ” (Gen. xxx. 27, 30.)

A similar mark of God’s favour was granted to Joseph in the land of his exile. In the service of Potiphar “ he was a prosperous man ; ” “ and his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand.” “ The Lord blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake ; and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field.” (Gen. xxxix. 2–5.)

~~The~~ reward conferred by God upon the Hebrew midwives in Egypt presents an instructive example of a

remunerating providence. They were commanded by Pharaoh to kill every male child of the Hebrews immediately after its birth ; but they “feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men-children alive.” “Therefore God dealt well with the midwives :” “and it came to pass, because the midwives feared God,” and abstained from the murderous acts that were enjoined upon them, “that He made them houses :” (Exod. i. 17, 20, 21 :) an expression which, according to the phraseology of the Old Testament, means, He gave them families. The reward corresponded with the obedience. They humanely and piously spared the Hebrew children, exposing their own lives to danger, rather than incurring the guilt of murder : and God not only preserved them from the wrath of the king, but also gave them children of their own, as a mark of special favour. “As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man, so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them.” (Psalm cxxvii. 4, 5.)

A corresponding result attended the presence of the ark in the house of Obed-edom, during the three months that it remained there. The ark was a chest of wood containing the two tables of stone on which the ten commandments were written by the finger of God. It was a special symbol of His presence, and instrument of His power. Its proper place was the tabernacle, and afterwards the temple. The Philistines, in their wars with Israel, took forcible possession of it, and carried it as a trophy into their own land ; where it proved to them a cause of grievous calamities ; so that they were glad to resign it to its proper owners. But when

David and his men were conducting it to its resting-place, Uzzah, forgetting the command of God that none but the Levites were to touch it, rashly laid hold upon it, and was smitten with death. David was discouraged, resigned his charge of the ark, and "carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite." "And the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his household. And it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark." (2 Sam. vi. 10-12.) In what manner the Lord "blessed" this good man and his family we are not informed. The expression is general, and may be fairly understood in its most comprehensive sense, as including bodily health, worldly prosperity, and spiritual enjoyments. Their crops were abundant, their trees fruitful, their cattle prolific, and their souls happy in God. The "blessing" was obvious, so as to attract general attention; and it was granted "because of the ark." A man who affords a willing and an efficient aid in respect of God's cause, the spread of Divine truth, and the extension of the church, secures a blessing upon himself, and upon his family, especially upon those of them who freely concur with him in his labours of love. May we not fairly conclude that a "blessing" from God rested upon the families that afforded accommodation for the preaching of the Gospel, and the formation of churches, in the apostolic times? (Rom. xvi. 5; 1 Cor. xvi. 19; Philemon 2.) "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but He blesseth the habitation of the just;" (Prov. iii. 33;) especially the "habitation" where His truth and ordinances are cordially received.

The patriarch Job was not more remarkable for the extent of his wealth, and the estimation in which he was generally held, than for the munificence of his charities, and the generous feeling with which they were distributed. All classes of suffering people engaged his attention, and had a share in his bounty; so that he could say in the presence of the men who regarded him with suspicion, "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy." "I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor: and the cause that I knew not I searched out." (Job xxix. 11-13, 15, 16.) "Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? was not my soul grieved for the poor?" (Job xxx. 25.) "If I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering; if his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep;" "then let mine arm fall from my shoulder-blade." (Job xxxi. 19, 20, 22.)

In these times of prosperity, when his family was entire, his property great and unimpaired, and he enjoyed all the luxury of doing good upon an extensive scale, and the honour connected with wealth and benevolence, he not only thought, but even "said, I shall die in my nest." (Job xxix. 18.) He knew not that days of darkness, adversity, and sorrow were near; when he would be childless, poor, afflicted, and reproached as a man addicted to secret sin and smitten

by the hand of God as a warning to others. Yet, his sufferings were not the punishment of sin, but the trial of his faith and patience; and when he had passed through the fiery ordeal, he received more signal favours from God than he had ever before enjoyed. His property was doubled, and by the providence of God his name is had in everlasting remembrance. "The Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends" who had traduced him. "Also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold. So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning." (Job xlii. 10-12.) We have here a fine example of providential remuneration. When the end for which Job's property was taken away had been answered, he received twice as much in return; and, having befriended others in a liberal manner, in the time of his prosperity, he himself was liberally befriended in the time of his necessity. Justly, therefore, is it said, "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth." "The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness." (Psalm xli. 1-3.) No man knows what help he may need in the future years of life. It is therefore matter of prudence, as well

as of absolute duty, for men in the time of prosperity to be "ready to distribute," and "willing to communicate."

We have mentioned among the retributions of Divine providence the personal, domestic, and national troubles with which David was visited after his sin with respect to Uriah. But his sin in that sad case was an exception to his general character; and his history presents a striking example of the happiness and honour which, by the appointment of God, are consequent upon a life of piety and uprightness. When he was chosen in early life to the kingly office which Saul had forfeited by his sin, he was pronounced "a man after God's own heart;" and in the fulfilment of his regal trust he, in the main, sustained that high character, till he yielded up his soul into the hands of God. He was a constitutional king, taking the law of Moses as the rule of his government, and never giving the slightest countenance to idolatry, however prone his subjects might be to that fearful evil. Of the worship of God he was a zealous and consistent promoter, both by his example and the exercise of his authority. The erection of the temple was projected by him; and although he was not allowed to build that splendid edifice, he collected the materials for it upon a scale the most liberal, and in a spirit of profound humility and thankfulness. (1 Chron. xxix.) He charged Solomon to finish the work thus auspiciously begun, and with the utmost earnestness and solemnity exhorted him to know and honour his father's God, to the utter exclusion of all the gods of the heathen. (1 Chron. xxviii. 9, 20.)

The respect which was providentially paid to the

memory of David, after his death, is a prominent subject of Scripture history. At various periods, when the people of Israel had grievously sinned against God, and His judgments were impending, He shortened the day of punishment, and forebore to inflict the full penalty of their sin, in consideration of His "servant David." To Solomon, in the time of his besotted apostasy, He therefore said, "I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son for David My servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen." Solomon himself was liable to deposition on the ground of his idolatry; but God said, "I will make him prince all the days of his life for David My servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept My commandments and My statutes." (1 Kings xi. 11-13, 34.) Upwards of twenty years afterwards, when Abijam, one of the kings of Judah, and a descendant from David, fell into a course of sin after the example of his own father, he was not disinherited, and why? "For David's sake did the Lord his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his son after him." (1 Kings xv. 4.) At a subsequent period, during the wicked reign of Jehoram, it is said, "The Lord would not destroy Judah for David His servant's sake." (2 Kings viii. 19.) Again, when Jerusalem was besieged in the time of Hezekiah, God said, "I will defend this city, to save it, for Mine own sake, and for My servant David's sake." (2 Kings xix. 34; xx. 6.) Hence it appears that on account of

David's general fidelity to God in the kingly office, God was pleased to perpetuate that office in David's family, though several of his descendants were worthless men ; and for the same reason He was pleased to confer important benefits upon Jerusalem, the seat of David's government. To no other Israelitish sovereign did God pay such respect in the arrangements of His providence. This was honour of the highest kind ; and it was conferred upon David, because in the general course of his life his heart was right with God, whom he never dishonoured by any act of idolatry.

It may be further observed that the providential honours conferred upon David extend through all time. His inspiration was distinctly recognised by the incarnate Son of God ; (Mark xii. 36;) who also declared that the Psalms of David possess a prophetic character. (Luke xxiv. 44.) To Christ is applied the title of "Son of David ;" (Mark x. 47;) the throne that David occupied was a type of the throne of Christ ; (Luke i. 32;) and the very words in which this holy man poured forth the feelings of his heart in confession, prayer, thanksgiving, and praise, are still uttered by the spiritual worshippers of God in their approaches to His mercy seat. Upon few men has God, in His providence, conferred honours more substantial and enduring, —"because David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that He commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." (1 Kings xv. 5.)

Among the female characters of the Old Testament, that of Ruth, the Moabitess, stands pre-eminent for simplicity and moral goodness ; and in her history the

remunerating providence of God is beautifully displayed. In the time of the Judges, when a famine prevailed in the Holy Land, Elimelech, a man belonging to the tribe of Judah, went with his wife and two sons into the country of the Moabites, in the hope of finding bread for himself and his family. He there died; and his sons formed marriage alliances in the land of their exile. They both died, and Naomi, the widow of Elimelech, was left with her two daughters-in-law, now also in a state of widowhood. On hearing that the famine which had been the cause of her removal had passed away, and a season of plenty had returned, Naomi resolved to retrace her steps to her native place. Her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, proposed to accompany her, and went with her part of the way, when she recommended them to return. "Orpah kissed her mother-in-law," and went back: "but Ruth clave unto her;" and said, "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." (Ruth i. 14-17.)

Here then we have a remarkable example of filial respect and affection. Naomi was not indeed the natural mother of Ruth; but Ruth had accepted her as a mother by marrying Naomi's son; and therefore with regard to Naomi Ruth came under the precept of God, "Honour thy mother:" a precept from which none can claim exemption.

Naomi belonged to a "people" with whom God had

entered into covenant, for purposes connected with His own glory, and whom He had separated from all other people as the objects of His special care. The land where they dwelt was His gift; all their religious and civil ordinances were of His appointment; He dwelt among them; He was pledged to bless them in perpetuity, and engaged to raise up among them the promised "Seed of the woman," in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. With these "people" Ruth resolved to cast in her lot, claiming a part in their privileges, and consenting to conform to their laws and modes of worship.

And further, she said to Naomi, "Thy God shall be my God." The Moabites generally were idolaters. Though descended from Lot, the nephew of Abraham, they had apostatized from their father's God, and worshipped Chemosh in the use of abominable rites. Against these apostates the Hebrew prophets uttered the severest denunciations of Divine vengeance. (1 Kings xi. 7; Isai. xv. 1; Jer. xlvi. 1-47.) When Ruth therefore said to her mother-in-law, "Thy God shall be my God," she renounced the idolatry of her own people, and engaged to devote herself to the worship and service of the God of Israel; expecting, in return, to enjoy His favour, which is better than life. On her entrance into the Holy Land, therefore, and when inquiry was made into her character and conduct, she was pronounced "a virtuous woman," and was said to have come to "trust under the wings of the Lord God of Israel." (Ruth ii. 12; iii. 11.) She was a willing convert from heathenism.

Such was Ruth the Moabitess, with whom the Lord

in return dealt bountifully. He led her by His providence to an honourable marriage with Boaz, a man of wealth, and of sincere piety. As "a virtuous woman," she was "a crown to her husband;" (Prov. xii. 4;) and with such a husband as Boaz, hers must have been a happy life. The issue of this marriage was the birth of Obed, "the father of Jesse, the father of David :" (Ruth iv. 17:) so that this godly proselyte from idolatry to the religion of the Hebrews became the great-grandmother of the most renowned of all the Israelitish kings ; and her name appears in the genealogy of the incarnate Son of God. (Matt. i. 5.) "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." (1 Tim. iv. 8.) All the happiness that Ruth enjoyed as the wife of Boaz, and all the honour that was conferred upon her in consequence of this relation, were, under God, made to depend upon her sanctified respect for her mother-in-law, the renunciation of her idolatrous family connexions, and the surrender of her heart and life to the God of Israel. She made a wise choice, and God crowned it with His blessing.

It often happens that acts of kindness, which do not appear to receive any adequate returns during the lifetime of the man who has performed them, receive a providential reward in his posterity. When Saul persecuted David in the most heartless and cruel manner, the injured man was befriended by Jonathan, who was a means of saving David's life ; and when Jonathan was dead, and David was seated upon the throne of Israel, "David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's

sake?" It was found that Jonathan had left a son, who was a cripple, to whom David's favour would indeed be welcome and a benefit. When this lame man was introduced to David, "he fell on his face, and did reverence." "And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually." "As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons." "So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king's table; and was lame on both his feet." (2 Sam. ix. 1-13.) We may easily suppose that when Jonathan was indulging himself in acts of the purest friendship towards David, he little thought that he was, in the arrangements of a merciful Providence, securing an ample fortune for his afflicted son, who was unable to provide for himself.

But more frequently providential rewards are conferred upon the men themselves whom God deems worthy of such distinctions. Abijah was the son of Jeroboam, to whose sin and punishment we have already adverted. The father brought upon himself and his family the most terrible calamities, by introducing among the ten tribes of Israel, of whom God had made him the king, the worship of the golden calves in Dan and Bethel. Abijah, though young in years, refused to fall into the general practice, maintaining a steady adherence to the God of heaven. He was destined to an early death; and during his illness his mother went in disguise to inquire of Ahijah, a prophet

of God, whether the son would recover or not. The answer was, that he would die,—evidently meaning that he would die in peace, and upon his bed,—and have an honourable interment, as a mark of God's favour; but that every other member of the family would be denied a grave, be eaten by dogs, or by birds of prey, “as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone.” The prophet added, “Arise thou therefore, get thee to thine own house: and when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die. And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam.” (1 Kings xiv. 12, 13.)

Hence it appears that Abijah, though called a “child,” was old enough to be a subject of true religion. “In him there was found some good thing,”—or “a good thing;” for the word “some” is added by the translators. True religion is that which connects man with God, and is in every respect “a good thing.” It is “good” in its origin; for it is not an endowment of nature, but an effect of the Holy Spirit’s influence. It is “good” in itself; for it comprehends faith in God, love to Him, delight in His service, and a fear of offending Him. It is “good” in its effects; for it makes its possessor happy in himself, useful to others, and fits him for heaven. This pious son of a wicked father honoured God, and God honoured him in return. Even his early death was a mercy; for he was spared the sight of the misery that came upon every other member of the family. “The child died; and they buried him; and all Israel mourned for him, according to the word

of the Lord, which He spake by the hand of His servant Ahijah the prophet." (1 Kings xiv. 17, 18.)

No branch of moral duty is more acceptable to God than filial obedience. Submission to parental authority is connected in the Old Testament with the promise of a long life in the Holy Land; and an apostle applies it to Christians in general in a manner somewhat similar. "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." (Exod. xx. 12.) "Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." (Eph. vi. 2, 3.) One of the most remarkable examples of obedience to this precept in a body of men, so far at least as the letter of the precept is concerned, we have in the Rechabites, of whom Jeremiah has given an account. Their father Jonadab charged them never to drink wine, nor build a house, nor sow a seed, nor plant a vineyard, nor have any, but to dwell in tents all their days; and after the lapse of two or three hundred years we find a company of these people living in strict conformity to his command, unreasonable as it was, and opposed to their interests and comfort. Yet, because God had commanded them to honour both father and mother, and a father in their family had directed them thus to depart from the general practice of mankind, they voluntarily submitted, and resolved that nothing should draw them aside from their peculiar mode of life. Their conduct formed a perfect contrast to that of the Jews in general with respect to

their heavenly Father. *He* gave them statutes and ordinances, which they refused to obey. The Rechabites obeyed the unreasonable command of their father, though it was not enforced either by the promise of a reward, or the threat of any punishment. The Jews disobeyed the commands of God, though the observance of them was enforced by promises the most rich and encouraging, and by penalties of the most awful kind. Jeremiah therefore “said unto the house of the Rechabites, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel ; Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you : therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel ; Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before Me for ever.” (Jer. xxxv. 18, 19.) As the reward of their filial obedience, God gave them the promise of a perpetual family existence.

The condition of Daniel in Babylon, and that of his friends, the three Hebrew children, was one of great difficulty and peril. They were not only strangers, but captives, placed entirely at the disposal of heathen men, many of whom hated them on account of their religion, envied them on account of their elevated character, and of the estimation in which they were held, and earnestly desired their ruin. Yet these exiles had strong convictions of their duty to the God of heaven, who was the God of their fathers, and also their God, to whom they had surrendered themselves in body, soul, and spirit. The three devoted youths were required to perform an act of public idolatry, on pain of being cast alive “into the midst of a burning fiery furnace ;” and of Daniel

it was demanded that he should abstain from prayer for thirty days, or be cast into a den of lions. In both these cases the upright men chose rather to endure the penalty than sin against God; and in both cases He so interfered as to preserve them from harm, and that by miracle. The three youths came out of the fire unhurt; and the lions were so restrained by the power of God, that Daniel spent a whole night with them in their den without sustaining the slightest injury. God honoured their faith, so that in one case it "quenched the violence of fire," and in the other it "stopped the mouths of lions." Their preservation was one of the highest displays of providential interposition; and the results to which it led were of the most momentous kind. God was glorified, and signal honours were conferred upon the faithful men who had so nobly passed through their respective trials. A declaration of the greatness and supremacy of God was sent through the wide extent of the Assyrian empire; and at the same time "the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon;" (Dan. iii. 30;) thus exempting them from future annoyance on account of their religion, and giving them means of promoting the spiritual and moral interests of the people. Daniel's deliverance was also followed by a public proclamation in that heathen land in honour of "the God of Daniel;" and "so this Daniel," as well as his friends, "prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian." (Dan. vi. 28.) In all these cases the advancement of the men was the direct consequence of their fidelity to God, and was brought about by His wise and gracious providence.

Upon Daniel, after he had submitted for conscience' sake to spend a night in the lions' den, were conferred honours greater than earthly monarchs can bestow. He was addressed as "Daniel, a man greatly beloved," by an angel who was sent to him as a messenger from God; and the prophetic spirit came upon him in an unwonted measure. The time of the Messiah's advent was revealed to him, with the fact that the Messiah should die as a propitiatory sacrifice, and thus secure for guilty men the blessing of full and free justification before God. He was also authorized to foretell the cessation of the Mosaic rites of Divine worship; the subversion of the Jewish state and polity; the introduction of a new dispensation of religion, under the name of the kingdom of God; the Romish apostasy; the bloody persecutions connected with it; the general resurrection; the final judgment; and "the end of the days," when the mystery of God shall be fulfilled. It was not until he had, in effect, made a sacrifice of his life to God, that these most wonderful and comprehensive discoveries were made to him.

"The Lord seeth not as man seeth." Men judge according to the outward appearance, but He looks at the heart. They therefore often condemn actions of which He approves, and approve actions which He condemns; because He sees the motives from which every action springs, and the purpose to which it is directed. When Mary of Bethany brake her box of ointment, and poured its expensive contents upon the head of her Lord, as He sat in the house of "Simon the leper," she was censured by the disciples, and by Judas in particular, as having done that which was matter of blame. The ointment, it was alleged, was "wasted;" and had

it been sold, it would have produced a sum of money which might have given extensive relief to the poor. "When Jesus understood it, He said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon Me. For ye have the poor always with you; but Me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on My body, she did it for My buria . Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her." (Matt. xxvi. 10-13.) In a few days our blessed Lord was to die, and descend into the grave. Mary anticipates these affecting events, and with feelings too deep for words, and which even actions could very inadequately express, she anoints the sacred body of her Lord with ointment of the most precious and costly kind. Regardless of censure, regardless of expense, she thinks of nothing but the honour of her Saviour, whom from her inmost soul she adores and loves; and He acknowledges her godly liberality and zeal, and declares that what she has done shall be reported till the end of time, and in every nation under heaven; for thus widely and permanently shall His "Gospel" be preached. Her name is therefore had in honourable remembrance, connected as it is with some of the last scenes of our Saviour's life; and her example has a world-wide influence.

Other persons, besides Mary, who showed their love to Christ, and their zeal for His glory, and the advancement of His work, have obtained a similar "memorial." Their names appear with honour in the imperishable records of the Bible; and their deeds of piety and

benevolence provoke others to a godly emulation. They did not anoint our Saviour's head; for many of them did not hear His name till He had risen from the dead, and returned to heaven: but they gave themselves and their property to further the work for which He lived and died.

Among the men who have been distinguished as the friends of Christ, and upon whom signal honours are conferred in return, we place His apostles in the first rank. The greater part of them were called indeed from humble and laborious employments to sustain the high office that was assigned them; but they were all prompt in their compliance with the Saviour's will. "And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And He saith unto them, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they *straightway* left their nets, and followed Him. And going on from thence, He saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. And they *immediately* left the ship and their father, and followed Him." (Matt. iv. 18-22.) When the other apostles were called, chosen, and sent forth, we read of no hesitation on their part, and much less of any refusal, notwithstanding the prospect of poverty and persecution that lay before them. (Matt. x. 1-42.) In this respect their conduct formed a contrast to that of several other persons whom He invited to follow Him. One wished first to bury his father; another requested to go and take leave of his family; and another went away sorrowful;

unwilling to make the sacrifices that Christ required. (Luke ix. 59-62; Matt. xix. 22.) With the exception of Judas, "the twelve" retained their faith in Him, and remained with Him till He expired on the cross; and having seen Him after His resurrection, and having then had their commission renewed, and received the gift of the Holy Ghost, they entered upon their work as Christ's "witnesses," and faithfully persevered in it till the end of life; most of them dying as martyrs to the truth, which it had been the business of their lives to declare.

In Saul of Tarsus we observe the same readiness to obey the call of Christ, and to enter upon the apostolic office, as soon as the call was given. To him the supreme authority of Christ was so manifested as to admit of no dispute; and he who had hitherto been "a persecutor, and injurious," instantly submitted, first to be taught the way of salvation, and then to become a witness for his Lord: so that, being saved from sin, and Divinely commissioned, "*straightway* he preached Christ" as the Son of God, and the Saviour of men. (Acts ix. 20.) He "conferred not with flesh and blood;" (Gal. i. 16;) but, like the rest of the apostles, made the will of Christ the rule of his life, and the glory of Christ the end of his every action, till he received the crown of martyrdom.

To the apostles was confided the task, first, of completing the Gospel revelation, by making known those "many things" which the Lord forbore to declare till after His resurrection and entrance into His glory; and, secondly, of confirming the truth of the Gospel by bearing witness to the ministry, the miracles, the resurrection,

and the saving power of Christ to the ends of the earth ; working miracles in His name, and laying down their lives for His sake. While exercising their ministry these blessed men were "made as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things ;" insomuch that St. Paul said, "I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death : for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men." "Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; being reviled, persecuted, defamed." (1 Cor. iv. 9, 11-13.) Yet, notwithstanding the hardships they endured, the hostility they encountered, and the contumely that was heaped upon them, no men have ever attained to equal honour. With respect to the greater part of them, the time and circumstances of their death are unknown. No mausoleums are erected to their memory ; no one can point out the places where their ashes rest ; yet have they a worldwide reputation, and will have, till the trumpet of the judgment shall sound, and the dead arise. Their names, recorded in Holy Scripture, are daily read by devout people in their closets and families ; they are read by ministers in Christian congregations, and are repeated in their public discourses every Sabbath day ; and with respect to the men themselves, their self-denial, zeal, singleness of purpose, and devotedness to Christ, present a standard of religious excellence, which thousands and tens of thousands of good people endeavour from age to age to imitate. No kings, no warriors, no statesmen, no philosophers, no men of letters, ever attained to honour so substantial and enduring. Theirs is an

honour derived from Christ, an honour connected with the best interests of mankind, and from age to age will increase rather than diminish. It is an “honour that cometh from God,” and will remain when all human glory shall have faded away. “If any man serve Me,” said our Saviour, “him will My Father honour.” (John xii. 26.)

Next to the apostles, the men that were associated with them in the propagation of the Gospel share in the honour of which we are now speaking. Such were the evangelists, the Christian prophets, the pastors and teachers of particular churches, the heads of families who opened their houses for the accommodation of Christian assemblies, and the godly women who gave entertainment to the apostles and their fellow-labourers in their extensive journeys, and imparted evangelical instruction to persons of their own sex. If the pious liberality of Mary shall be permanently “told for a memorial of her,” the services of her brother Lazarus and of her sister Martha will not be forgotten; and the still more important services of Timothy, of Titus, of Luke, of Mark, of Epaphras, of Epaphroditus, of Philemon, of Onesiphorus, of Lydia, of Aquila and Priscilla, and of others, “shall be told” for the same purpose. It is not by chance, but providential design, that their “names” are inserted in the inspired records. Their “memory is blessed,” and shall be “had in everlasting remembrance.” If “a good name,” in the general estimation of mankind, “is rather to be chosen than great riches;” “a good name” in the book of God is perhaps the highest honour attainable in this world, and second only to the sentence of approval to be pronounced by the Judge of

quick and dead. The honour conferred upon the names just mentioned forms a perfect contrast to the brand that is impressed upon the names of such men as Herod, Pontius Pilate, Caiaphas, Judas, Demas, and Alexander the coppersmith.

But an honourable name in the inspired volume, or in the records of authentic history, is not the only reward vouchsafed by God to His faithful servants in this world. There is also "the secret of the Lord with them that fear Him;" inward tokens of His favour, and the cheering testimony of a pure and enlightened conscience, producing joys which escape the observation of other men, and with which "a stranger" does "not intermeddle." Connected with every act of piety and of moral righteousness there is a blessing secured by express promise from God: so that all His servants have within themselves a consolation rich and abiding, immensely surpassing that which flows from popular applause.

The remunerations of Divine providence, vouchsafed to good men in this world, naturally lead our thoughts to the greater rewards of righteousness which await the people of God in a future state. It is there that every one will "receive a reward according to his own labour;" a reward immensely surpassing any honours or enjoyments that they ever realized in this world. To stand with the Lamb upon Mount Zion; to walk with Christ in white; to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God; to see God; to unite in the worship of God with angels of every order, and with the entire body of God's sanctified children; to sit at the right hand of Christ upon His throne, as He sits at

the right hand of the Father; to be for ever exempted from sorrow, pain, and death; to be ever with the Lord; and to be invested with the "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," which even an apostle could not adequately express: such is the blessedness which will crown a life of evangelical obedience. Well, then, might St. Paul close his sublime discourse on the resurrection of the dead with the impressive exhortation: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Cor. xv. 58.) Christians "know" the certainty of their future reward from personal experience and observation, and still more from the promises of God, all of which are in Christ yea and amen.

## CHAPTER XI.

## PROVIDENTIAL ANSWERS TO PRAYER.

THAT spiritual blessings are the gifts of God, and that they are bestowed by Him in answer to prayer, will be denied by no one who assents to the teaching of Holy Scripture. David prayed for the pardon of his sin, and for a clean heart ; and all men must in this respect follow his example, or perish in their guilt, and in the corruption of their nature. St. Paul bowed his knees before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for himself and for others, that they might be saved from sin, filled with the fulness of God, and conducted to heaven ; and our Saviour uttered a parable to this end, “that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”

According to the Scriptures, temporal good, the gifts of Divine providence, are to be sought and obtained in the same manner, whatever a sceptical philosophy may suggest to the contrary. The Lord Jesus taught His disciples to pray to their heavenly Father for their “ daily bread :” and in the national form of devotion the people are called upon, unitedly as well as individually, to ask of God “ the things which are requisite and necessary as well for the body as the soul.” On this subject the doctrine of the Bible is both illustrated

and confirmed by examples innumerable, every one of which is full of instruction and encouragement.

The first example of intercessory prayer that we find recorded in Holy Scripture is that of Abraham for Sodom and Gomorrah, the purposed destruction of which was declared by God to the patriarch, who immediately began to plead in behalf of the guilty and doomed cities. He presented no less than seven pleas for their preservation, to every one of which the Almighty condescended to accede. But when it was ascertained that there were not ten righteous persons in those cities, Abraham ceased to ask that they might be spared. Whether he was afraid further to encroach upon the Divine clemency, or whether he desisted because he thought that populous cities thus degenerate ought not to be spared, we know not; but Abraham's plea was accepted as far as it went; and it was not until he had ceased to plead that the threatened punishment was inflicted. "And the Lord went His way, as soon as He had left communing with Abraham; and Abraham returned unto his place." (Gen. xviii. 17-33.)

With some persons it is a maxim that marriages are made in heaven. This cannot, however, be said of every marriage that takes place; for believers are sometimes yoked with unbelievers, in direct opposition to a Divine precept. But wise and holy marriages are approved of God, and sanctioned by His blessing. When Abraham sent his servant to Mesopotamia, to select a wife for his son Isaac, the servant deeply felt the responsibility that rested upon him, and therefore prayed for providential guidance in the delicate affair that was confided to his management. On his arrival at the

appointed place, he halted by the side of a well, and asked of God a sign with respect to "the daughters of the men of the city," who were expected to "come out to draw water." "He said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray Thee, send me good speed this day." "Let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink ; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also : let the same be she that Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac ; and thereby shall I know that Thou hast showed kindness unto my master." He had scarcely uttered this request before Rebekah, the daughter of Abraham's brother, appeared ; and without even knowing who the stranger was, and much less knowing anything of his errand and his prayer, she presented the required sign in its complete form. In this manner Rebekah, with the concurrence of her father and of the other members of her family, became the wife of Isaac. Finding his prayer answered, the servant, reporting the happy result of his journey, and of the request he had offered to God, said, "I bowed my head, and worshipped the Lord, and blessed the Lord God of my master Abraham, which had led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son." (Gen. xxiv. 12-14, 48.)

When Jacob returned from Padan-aram, attended by a numerous family, and by flocks and herds in abundance, he was painfully apprehensive of the murderous hostility of his brother Esau, on account of the fraudulent manner in which he had many years before obtained his father's blessing. He therefore sent his servants to inform Esau of his return, charging them to address

him in the most respectful terms, as Jacob's "lord." They came back with all haste, saying that Esau was coming to meet Jacob, attended by four hundred men. On hearing this, Jacob "was greatly afraid and distressed," believing that Esau's intentions were hostile, and that he, his wives, and his children would all be slain, unless God in His providence should mercifully interpose; for he himself had no effectual means of defence. In consternation, therefore, and terror, "Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto Thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee : I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant ; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan ; and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau : for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children." (Gen. xxxii. 9-11.)

Having made this affecting appeal to the God of his fathers, Jacob provided a series of handsome presents for his brother, for the purpose of subduing his anger, and of conciliating his favour. He then divided his family into three distinct companies, placing the favourite wife Rachel and her son Joseph last; that, in case the rest should be slain, these might escape, or, at least, be the last to suffer.

Night now came on ; "Jacob was left alone ; and there wrestled a Man with him until the breaking of the day." In this mysterious stranger we recognise the Author of salvation, "the everlasting Son of the

Father," who often in those early times assumed the human form. The "wrestling" that then took place, and was continued all night, was a spiritual as well as a physical conflict; for Jacob "wept, and made supplication." (Hosea xii. 4.) And not in vain. He had "power with God, and prevailed" in his suit; he saw "the face of God," and obtained the blessing that he desired. Among other benefits, that blessing comprehended safety for Jacob and his family. For, the next day Esau, divested of all hostile feeling, and full of affection, "ran to meet" his brother, "and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept" in each other's arms. (Gen. xxxii. 28, 29; xxxiii. 4.) The reconciliation of the brothers was complete and permanent. Upwards of twenty years afterwards we find them celebrating together the funeral of their father. "The days of Isaac were an hundred and fourscore years. And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days: and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him." (Gen. xxxv. 28, 29.) "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city;" (Prov. xviii. 19;) but God can subdue the most malignant heart. Jacob obtained by prayer what his princely gifts were unable to secure.

Moses was not more remarkable for his meekness, and for his firmness and wisdom as the leader of the people of Israel, than he was for power and success in prayer. No sooner had he conducted the tribes through the Red Sea, witnessed the overthrow of Pharaoh and his host, and joined in the song of triumph, and of praise to God, than he found the people of his care attacked by an army of Amalekites with the king at their head.

In this emergency Moses directed Joshua to lead chosen men of Israel against these presumptuous assailants ; and at the same time he ascended an adjoining mountain, with "the rod of God" in his hand, accompanied by Aaron and Hur. The rod was the symbol and instrument of God's power. It had been used in the infliction of the threatened plagues upon Pharaoh and his people, and in dividing the waters of the Red Sea. "And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed : and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy ; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon ; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side ; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword." (Exod. xvii. 11-13.)

That Moses held up "the rod of God," while the men of Israel were engaged in the fight, there can be no doubt. The exhibition of it was an appeal to God, and an encouragement to Joshua and his brave companions, who were defending themselves, their property, their wives, their children, and their aged men and women. But one hand of Moses was sufficient to hold up the rod. Whereas "Aaron and Hur stayed up" both "his hands ;" and they did this till the close of the battle, at "the going down of the sun." We conclude, therefore, that Moses did not satisfy himself with merely holding up the rod, but also lifted up his hands and heart to God in earnest and believing prayer ; and in this manner secured the interposition of God, giving success to Joshua and his men, and inflicting merited

punishment upon a people who set God at defiance, and attempted to rob His people of the property that He had given them. The success of Israel was made to depend, under God, upon the ability of Moses to hold up the rod, and to persevere in prayer. Joshua fought; Moses held up the rod and prayed; Aaron and Hur lent him their friendly aid; and God, in His providence, brought the battle to a successful issue.

Other cases called forth the prayers of Moses; and other answers, equally remarkable, were granted by Almighty God. When Aaron, at the instigation of the people, made a golden calf, and they danced around it as an act of worship, in open contempt of God's authority, and within the awful sights and sounds of Mount Sinai; "the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: now therefore let Me alone, that My wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation." On hearing this announcement, Moses "fell down before the Lord," in earnest prayer, pleading the promises of God, the honour of His name, and what He had already done for these people. This was not a hasty act of intercession, performed at once. For "forty days" Moses "did neither eat bread, nor drink water," while he besought the Almighty to spare the people who had provoked His wrath. He "prayed for Aaron also" at "the same time." "And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, O, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written." "And the

Lord repented of the evil which He thought to do unto His people," and the offenders were spared. (Exod. xxxii. 9-11, 14, 31, 32; Deut. ix. 18, 20, 25, 26.)

At another time, when these wayward and unthankful "people complained" of God's treatment of them, "it displeased the Lord: and the Lord heard it; and His anger was kindled; and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp. And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the Lord, the fire was quenched." (Num. xi. 1, 2.)

When Miriam was smitten with leprosy, as the punishment of her presumption in claiming with her brother Aaron a co-ordinate authority with Moses, whom God had specially commissioned as the interpreter of His will to the tribes of Israel, "Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech Thee;" (Num. xii. 13;) and God granted the request, though He humbled the offender by sending her out of the camp seven days; thus upholding Moses's authority, while He answered Moses's prayer.

The prayers of Samuel, as well as his example and official acts as a judge, were of immense benefit to the Hebrew people, and that to the end of his life. "The lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines. And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines. And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the Lord: and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him.

And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel." "So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel." (1 Sam. vii. 7-10, 13.)

At a subsequent period, the fickle Israelites, weary of the theocracy under which they were placed, clamoured for a king, that they might be like the neighbouring nations; and God in His displeasure consented, so as to direct Samuel to anoint Saul as their future sovereign; but at the same time He gave them sensible proof that in this matter they had done wickedly, inasmuch as they had rejected Him in the kingly character, which He had hitherto condescended to sustain for their benefit. "Samuel called unto the Lord; and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king." "God forbid," answered the devout prophet, "that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." (1 Sam. xii. 18, 19, 23.) The general impression upon the minds of the people, confirmed by long experience and observation, evidently was, that the prayers of this upright and holy man were directly connected with the national welfare, whether they had a king or not; and to pray for them Samuel felt to be a duty which he

owed to God and to them, and which he could not neglect without "sin."

When David was driven from his home on the occasion of the rebellion raised against his government by his son Absalom, Ahithophel, one of the ablest statesmen of his age, became one of the principal advisers of the profligate young man. "The counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom." "And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O Lord, I pray Thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." At the same time, it appears that David halted in his journey, and worshipped God in the open air, in a formal and deliberate manner, dreading the sagacity of the man who had been one of his own advisers. There is reason to believe that Bathsheba, whom David had defiled, belonged to the family of Ahithophel; and that under the influence of personal resentment this able statesman transferred his services from the father to the son.\* Having made his solemn appeal to God, David requested his faithful friend Hushai to return to Jerusalem, and endeavour, in the best manner he could, to defeat the schemes of the rebels. The counsel of Ahithophel was, that Absalom should openly defile his father's concubines, and thus render a reconciliation between the father and the son impossible; and then that David and his attendants should be instantly pursued, and, if possible, slain, before they had time to prepare for self-defence.

\* Blunt's "Undesigned Coincidences," pp. 140-144.

Hushai advised delay, and the assembling of a greater force, before they presumed to encounter such warriors as David and the men that were with him. "And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. For the Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom." "And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father." (2 Sam. xv. 31-34; xvi. 23; xvii. 1-14, 23.) Thus the prayer of penitent David was answered, and the shrewd counsellor of mischief ended his guilty career.

At another unhappy period of his life David ordered the people of Israel to be numbered, apparently for the purpose of ascertaining the military strength of the kingdom; for when Joab, to whom this matter was confided, gave in his report, he specified the number of men that were able to bear arms, and appears to have said nothing concerning any other class of people. The entire scheme savoured of creaturely confidence, rather than of that simple trust in God, which, as His covenant people, the nation was authorized to cherish. We read therefore that "God was displeased with this thing;" and, to humble the national pride, He smote Israel with the "pestilence," of which "seventy thousand men" died. When the destroying angel appeared with his drawn sword over Jerusalem, David purchased the threshing-floor of Ornan, and "built there an altar unto

the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the Lord ; and He answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering. And the Lord commanded the angel ; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof." (1 Chron. xxi. 1-27.) The plague ceased when prayer was offered to God in connexion with a propitiatory sacrifice ; for the ear of His mercy is always open to the cry that is uttered by a broken and contrite heart.

The psalms of David are an affecting record of his earnest applications to God in prayer both for temporal and spiritual deliverances and blessings ; and no less of the seasonable answers he received, and of his praises and thanksgivings in return for all that God had done for him. His was a life of persecution, and of personal, domestic, and national trouble, as well as a life of labour, honour, and prosperity ; but in every season of danger and distress he found effectual relief by an appeal to the mercy of God in prayer, of which he has left many examples, that the generations to come might be instructed and encouraged by his example and experience, and " give themselves unto prayer." He was a man of war, and therefore often in great peril ; but it is repeatedly recorded that " the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went ;" (2 Sam. viii. 6, 14;) and he himself exclaimed, apparently with wonder and thankfulness, " O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation, Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle :" (Psalm cxl. 7 :) a benefit for which he never ceased to pray.

When Solomon succeeded his father David as the king of Israel, the Lord appeared to him in a dream by night, and said, " Ask what I shall give thee. And

Solomon said,.....Thy servant is in the midst of Thy people which Thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and bad : for who is able to judge this Thy so great a people? And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him,.....Behold, I have done according to thy words : lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart ; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee." "And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt." "And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom." (1 Kings iii. 5-12 ; iv. 30, 34.) Hence it appears that the wisdom of Solomon, which during his life-time engaged the admiration of surrounding nations, and for which he has now been renowned for nearly three thousand years, was given to him by God in answer to prayer. And even now, "if any man lack wisdom," he is directed to "ask it of God," with an assurance that "it shall be given ;" especially the wisdom that leads to final salvation. (James i. 5.)

Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple was remarkable for its sublimity and comprehensiveness, as well as for the spirit of pure devotion. It embraces almost every variety of human want, both personal and national ; and it met with a gracious acceptance. "And it came to pass, when Solomon had finished the building of the house of the Lord,.....that the Lord

appeared to Solomon the second time.....And the Lord said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before Me : I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put My name there for ever ; and Mine eyes and Mine heart shall be there perpetually." (1 Kings viii. 22-53 ; ix. 1-3.) Happy would it have been for Solomon, had he preserved to the end of life the spirit and habit of devout prayer, which on these early occasions he manifested, and in the exercise of which he received such cheering tokens of God's favour ! Had he "continued in prayer," he would never have become the degraded sensualist and idolater that he was in the latter years of his life.

No sin is more dishonourable to God, or more offensive in His sight, than idolatry, especially in a people whom He has raised up to be His witnesses in the world, as were the Hebrew tribes. When Jeroboam, therefore, set up the two golden calves in Dan and Bethel, as objects of worship for the ten tribes, who had withdrawn their allegiance from the house of David, he received timely and solemn warning of his sin, and of the punishment that would certainly ensue. Having erected an altar at Bethel in honour of the idol he had placed there, he presumed to burn incense upon it, when there stood forth a man of God, who was sent from Judah to bear testimony against this daring wickedness. "He cried against the altar in the word of the Lord, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord ; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name ; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee." With the utterance of these words

he gave a sign that God had sent him, and that in due time the prediction would be fulfilled. He declared that the altar would be rent in two, and the ashes upon it poured out. The sign immediately followed. But the infatuated king, instead of taking the warning, was irritated at this interference with his plans, and "put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand, which he put forth against" the man of God "dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him." There he stood before the people whom he was attempting to alienate from the God of their fathers, and mislead to their ruin, an object of helplessness and pity; his arm stretched out, stiff, dry, and withered. The idol to which he has just offered incense cannot help him; and he is compelled publicly to confess the supremacy of the God of Israel. Humbled and mortified, he "said unto the man of God," whom he had attempted to arrest, "Entreat now the face of the Lord thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again. And the man of God besought the Lord, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before." (1 Kings xiii. 1-6.) Here were three miracles, all demonstrative of the power and presence of God:—the rending of the altar; the drying up of the king's arm; the restoration of the arm. The third miracle was wrought in answer to prayer.

The history of Jabez is brief, but singularly instructive. It occurs in a long list of names of persons belonging to the tribes of Israel. But the inspired historian seems to have felt that he ought not to satisfy himself merely with giving the name and genealogy of a man so distinguished. He therefore says, "And

Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, O that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me ! And God granted him that which he requested." (1 Chron. iv. 10.) The besetting sin of the Hebrew people was idolatry ; but Jabez wisely adhered to the "God of Israel," the God of his fathers ; the true God, who made the heaven and the earth, with all that they contain ; who had entered into covenant with Abraham and his posterity, and keepeth truth for ever. Nor did he worship God in a careless and formal manner. The very form of his prayer shows the earnestness of his desire.

He prayed for a blessing from God. "O that Thou wouldest bless me indeed !" The request is expressed in general terms, and may be fairly understood to include good of every kind ; the good that is needful with respect both to this world and the next. But spiritual blessings, such as the forgiveness of sin and a clean heart, are blessings "indeed," valuable and important above all the rest, because they secure our happiness and safety in time and eternity.

The prayer for the enlargement of his "coast" was in full accordance with the will of God. He had given the tribes of Israel the entire land of Canaan ; but they were not able at once to conquer and occupy the whole of it. So that, when "Joshua was old and stricken in years," the Lord said to him, "There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed." Jabez had a portion of land awarded to him ; and he desired its enlargement, not by unlawful means, but by the will and bless-

ing of God, and in accordance with God's declared purpose.

The "hand" is the instrument of power ; and by the hand of God we understand His power in operation. The interposition of His power is necessary in order to the success of all our lawful undertakings, whatever they may be. "It is He that giveth thee power to get wealth ;" (Deut. viii. 18;) and without His gracious aid no man can acceptably perform any duty either religious or moral.

"Evil," from which Jabez desired to be "kept," is of two kinds ; the evil of suffering, and the evil of sin ; and God only can keep us from both. From the evil of suffering no man has any right to claim absolute exemption ; but in answer to prayer it will often be moderated, and will always be overruled for good. To be kept from the "evil" of sin is a matter of the highest importance ; for the "grief" that is consequent upon it is intolerable, and in many cases endless.

To the whole of his requests Jabez received an answer from "the God of Israel ;" and the answer appears to have placed him in a position of "honour" above his "brethren." His mother "bare him with sorrow," and gave him a name which should serve as a constant memorial of what she suffered when she gave him birth ; but, if we suppose her to have been a right-minded woman, she had more comfort in him than in any of her other sons ; for the "honour" that cometh from God is the highest distinction to which any man can attain. That distinction Jabez received in answer to prayer.

Elijah was one of the most eminent prophets of the Old Testament, remarkable for his courage, fidelity, and

zeal, in the service of God ; and no less remarkable for the spirit of prayer, and the answers he received from God. When persecuted by Ahab, he resided for some time in the house of a poor widow, in a strange land. Her son died ; and Elijah “cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray Thee, let this child’s soul come into him again. And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah ; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.” (1 Kings xvii. 21, 22.)

An answer to his prayer, equally remarkable, was granted in his contests with the priests of Baal. In the presence of an immense body of people, with the idolatrous king at their head, it was agreed that the priests of Baal should call upon their god, and Elijah upon the God of Israel ; and the God that answered by fire should be acknowledged as the only proper object of religious homage. The priests of Baal offered sacrifice, and called upon their god from morning till evening ; but “there was neither voice, nor any to answer.” Elijah then “came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day, that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that Thou art the Lord God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces : and they said, The Lord, He is the God ; the Lord, He is the God.” (1 Kings xviii. 29, 36-39.)

Another example of his success in prayer is thus described by St. James : "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain : and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." (James v. 17, 18.) These prayers of the prophet, and the answers that God condescended to give, were designed to reclaim the ten tribes of Israel from the idolatry which Jeroboam had established among them, and induce them to return to the God of their fathers, on whom alone they were dependent for the fruits of the earth, and every other blessing ; and the apostle refers to them as matter of instruction and encouragement to Christians generally, (1 Kings xviii.,) especially in times of public calamity.

*"God proclaims*

His hot displeasure against foolish men  
 That live an atheist life : involves the heavens  
 In tempests; quits His grasp upon the winds,  
 And gives them all their fury ; bids a plague  
 Kindle a fiery boil upon the skin,  
 And putrefy the breath of blooming health.  
 He calls for famine, and the meagre fiend  
 Blows mildew from between his shrivell'd lips,  
 And taints the golden ear. He springs His mines,  
 And desolates a nation at a blast.  
 Forth steps the spruce philosopher, and tells  
 Of homogenial and discordant springs  
 And principles; of causes, how they work  
 By necessary laws their sure effects;  
 Of action and reaction. He has found  
 The source of the disease that nature feels,  
 And bids the world take heart and banish fear.  
 Thou fool ! will thy discovery of the cause  
 Suspend the effect, or heal it ? Has not God

Still wrought by means since first He made the world ?  
 And did He not of old employ His means  
 To drown it ? What is His creation less  
 Than a capacious reservoir of means  
 Form'd for His use, and ready at His will ?  
 Go, dress thine eyes with eye-salve ; ask of Him,  
 Or ask of whomsoever He has taught ;  
 And learn, though late, the genuine cause of all.” \*

All creatures are in the hands of God, who is ever mindful of the prayers and wants of His human offspring. “ I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness : I make peace, and create evil : I the Lord do all these things.” (Isai. xlvi. 6, 7.) “ And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens,” when they ask, as it were, to send their rain on the earth ; “ and they shall hear the earth,” when it supplicates, as it were, for rain ; “ and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil,” when they ask, as it were, to supply the wants of man ; “ and they shall hear Jezreel :” all nature shall hear, and minister to, the people whom God shall restore to their own land after years of captivity and exile. (Hosea ii. 21, 22.) †

The character and ministry of Elisha bore a strong resemblance to those of Elijah, his great predecessor in the prophetic office. He also was addicted to prayer, and received answers from God of even a miraculous kind. At his request the son of the Shunammite was raised from the dead. “ When Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the Lord.” And, after

\* Cowper.

† Benson.

using various signs, "the flesh of the child waxed warm;" "and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes," and was presented to his grateful mother. (2 Kings iv. 32-36.)

About two years afterwards "a great host" of Syrians, "with horses and chariots," surrounded the city where Elisha was, intending to make him their prisoner, because they suspected that he gave information of their secret proceedings to the king of Israel. "His servant," full of alarm, "said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." Here was the prophet's security. And when the hostile Syrians, with their vast military array, "came down" to seize the man of God, he "prayed unto the Lord, and said, Smite this people, I pray Thee, with blindness. And He smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha." The men, thus rendered helpless, willingly surrendered themselves to the guidance of the prophet, who led them to Samaria, the capital of the country they had invaded. Here Elisha renewed his prayer, and said, "Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria." When the king of Israel saw a hostile army thus placed under his power, he eagerly inquired of the prophet whether he might not "smite them." The prophet answered, "Thou shalt

not smite them." "Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink." "And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel." (2 Kings vi. 14-23.)

In this manner did Almighty God, in the tenderness of His mercy, not only authenticate the ministry of His prophet, but manifest His own power and supremacy before the heathen, and before faithless and backsliding Israel; if haply they would receive instruction and warning, and submit to His will. The prayers of Elisha were made subservient to these objects.

Jejoahaz, like his predecessors, the kings of the ten tribes, was a bad man, whose example his subjects generally followed. "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He delivered them into the hand of Hazael king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael, all their days. And Jejoahaz besought the Lord, and the Lord hearkened unto him: for He saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them. And the Lord gave Israel a saviour, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians: and the children of Israel dwelt in their tents, as beforetime." (2 Kings xiii. 3-5.) Notwithstanding the former wickedness of the king, his prayer was heard in behalf of an oppressed and suffering people, the posterity of Abraham, whom God had called His "friend." Many of the people, also, in all probability, united with the king in earnest prayer to God when His hand was heavy upon them. This was indeed one design of the judgment under which they laboured.

"In the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us." (Jer. ii. 27.)

To the invasion of Judea and the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib, at the head of a powerful army, we have already directed our attention. In that perilous exigency of his affairs, Hezekiah, feeling that human efforts would be unavailing without Divine aid, sent messengers to Isaiah, saying, "Lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left;" and he himself, with the threatening letter he had received from the enemy, went to the house of the Lord, spread the letter before the Lord, and poured out his soul in earnest prayer for relief. The united prayers of the prophet and the king were heard, and the destruction of the Assyrian army was the consequence. (Isai. xxxvii. 4, 14, 20, 36.)

"In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amos came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live. Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the Lord."

"And Hezekiah wept sore." Some persons have expressed surprise that so good a man should have manifested such deep sorrow when he received this message, and have thought that his trouble arose from the obscurity which rested upon the doctrine of a future state, before "our Saviour Jesus Christ" had "abolished death," and "brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel."

(2 Tim. i. 10.) Perhaps the true reason rather was, that he regarded the message delivered with such abruptness, as an indication of the Divine displeasure: and a man of his spirit could not but feel that to die under the frown of his Maker was a great calamity. His cry, however,

was heard. "Then came the word of the Lord to Isaiah, saying, Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years." The conjecture we have offered as to the cause of Hezekiah's sorrow is confirmed by an expression in the thanksgiving which he uttered on the occasion of his recovery: "Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back." (Isai. xxxviii. 1-5, 17.) He here connects the recovery of his health with the forgiveness of his sins, and the consequent removal of God's displeasure; and both these blessings he received in answer to prayer.

We find in Scripture prayer offered to God with acceptance in the conflict of battle, when the parties were hard pressed by the enemy, and yet were persuaded of the justice of their cause. Thus when "the sons of Reuben, and the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh," "made war with the Hagarites, with Jetur, and Nephish, and Nodab," "they were helped against them, and the Hagarites were delivered into their hand, and all that were with them: for they cried to God in the battle, and He was entreated of them; because they put their trust in Him." (1 Chron. v. 18-20.)

Asa was one of the few godly kings of Judah, and had, on the whole, a peaceful and prosperous reign; but he did not neglect the fortifications of the country over which he had the dominion. "There came out against him Zerah the Ethiopian with a host of a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots." "Then Asa went out against him, and they set the battle

in array." "And Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, it is nothing with Thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, Thou art God; let not man prevail against Thee. So the Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled." (2 Chron. xiv. 9-12.)

Jehoshaphat, another of the kings of Judah, was a son of Asa, and not unworthy of his parentage. He formed, however, an unwise alliance with Ahab, which had nearly proved fatal to him. He accompanied Ahab to the battle-field at Ramoth-gilead, where that wicked man lost his life. As Jehoshaphat appeared in his royal robes, and Ahab disguised himself, he was mistaken for Ahab, and surrounded by the enemy. "But Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him; and God moved them to depart from him." (2 Chron. xviii. 31.)

Not long after this escape, when he had returned to Jerusalem, he found "a great multitude" of armed men, belonging to various nations, on their way to invade his kingdom, which, now that the ten tribes were severed from it, was comparatively feeble. He therefore "feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah;" and when the people were assembled, he offered in their behalf and his own an earnest and comprehensive prayer; in which he said, "O our God,.....we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee. And all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children." As soon as the king had uttered

his prayer, the prophetic spirit came upon a Levite in the congregation, who assured all present that they would have no need to fight; for that God Himself would settle the account with this formidable host. On hearing this announcement, "Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground; and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the Lord, worshipping the Lord." The prediction was more than fulfilled. The confederated armies slew one another, and the men of Judah had nothing to do but gather and divide the spoil; which they found to be not only extremely valuable in itself, but so abundant as to be "more than they could carry away." (2 Chron. xx.)

Of all the profligate kings with whom the people of Israel were ever cursed, perhaps Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, was the worst. He made the temple of God a place of idolatry; and so corrupted the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as to render them worse than the nations of Canaan, who were exterminated by God's express command. "The Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken. Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him: and He was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord He was God." (2 Chron. xxxiii. 10-13.) That a man who had been so desperately wicked, so deeply degraded, and so

severely punished, should not only be forgiven in answer to prayer, but also restored to his kingly honours and authority, is a marvellous display of the goodness of God ; who does indeed “keep mercy for thousands,” and “forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin.” But Manasseh was the son of a pious father ; and doubtless the father’s prayers were also remembered in the son’s behalf.

One of the most decisive signs that the ruin of the Jewish nation was at hand, as the time of the Babylonian captivity drew near, was the command given by God to Jeremiah to discontinue his prayers for his countrymen. “Pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to Me ; for I will not hear thee.” (Jer. vii. 16.) “Then said the Lord unto me, Pray not for this people for their good.” (Jer. xiv. 11.)

The sacred volume teaches us to connect prayer with the miraculous preservation of Jonah, and with the mercy that God extended to the Ninevites. As the punishment of his refusal to fulfil his mission to Nineveh, Jonah was thrown into the sea ; but “the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish’s belly, and said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and He heard me ; out of the belly of hell cried I, and Thou heardest my voice.” His cry was not only “heard,” but answered. “The Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.” (Jonah i. 17 ; ii. 1, 2, 10.) The cavils of infidelity, which have often been urged with respect to this case, are scarcely worthy of attention. The facts

are strictly miraculous; and certainly the agency to which they are ascribed was every way sufficient to produce them. They are ascribed to the power of God, and their reality is attested by His incarnate Son; who declares that "Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly," and that "the men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonas." (Matt. xii. 40, 41.) Let the men who ridicule or contradict His testimony remember that they must stand before His judgment-seat.

The warning which Jonah was commissioned to deliver to the Ninevites was brief and emphatic. "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." No condition was expressed, but a condition was implied. The fact, that a respite of "forty days" was granted, was an intimation that the threatened calamity might be averted, if proper means were used in order to that end; and especially if the sins which had offended the Almighty were confessed, repented of, and renounced. Thus the matter was understood by the king and people of Nineveh. "He arose from his throne," laid aside his robes of state, "covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes." He enjoined a general fast; and said, "Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that He had said that He would do unto them; and He did it not." (Jonah iii. 4, 6-10.)\*

\* See Note F, in the Appendix.

When Daniel and his three friends were taken captives to Babylon, they were recognised as persons who were not only "well favoured," but "skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science," and were appointed to study "the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans," that they might "stand in the king's palace." When they were afterwards introduced to the king, they were found to be proficients in the various branches of knowledge which they had been directed to acquire. In the mean while the king had a prophetic dream relating to the four great monarchies of the ancient world. This dream he was anxious to understand; but he had lost all recollection of the particulars it contained. He required his "wise men" to tell him his dream, and to explain its meaning, neither of which they were able to do; and, in the true spirit of an eastern despot, he directed that they should be put to death. Daniel was apprehensive that he and his three brethren might be included in this cruel sentence, and therefore requested that with him "they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven." The answer to this prayer was the foundation of all Daniel's greatness, and led to the most important results with respect to himself, his three friends, and the Assyrian empire. (Daniel i., ii.)

Daniel, though an exile, and a statesman connected with a heathen government, was a sincere patriot, and never lost sight of the interests of the Jewish people,

nor of the true worship of God. He learned from the prophecies of Jeremiah that the captivity of his countrymen, in which he was a personal sufferer, was to continue "seventy years;" and as the end of that period approached, he cherished an intense desire for their return to their own land; that the demolished temple at Jerusalem might be rebuilt, and the worship of God resumed according to the Mosaic law. With these feelings, he says, "I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: and I prayed unto the Lord my God." The prayer that he offered on this occasion he has recorded. It is remarkable for its earnestness; for the copiousness of its confession of sin, of which the existing captivity was the punishment; and it expresses the strongest possible desire for the restoration of God's worship in His sanctuary.

While he was yet speaking, before the prayer was finished, an answer was returned; and more was granted than he had even dared to ask. He was not only told that "a commandment should go forth to restore and build Jerusalem," but was informed as to the great purpose of Christ's manifestation in the flesh, the exact period when it would take place, and the mighty events, religious and political, that would be consequent upon it. Other discoveries were subsequently made to this man of prayer, of events which reach to the end of the world. (Daniel ix. 2-4, 20, 24-27.)

In the age which immediately succeeded that of Daniel lived Nehemiah, who also cherished deep patriotic yearnings, which he expressed in fervent prayer to God. He belonged to the captivity, and was cupbearer to

Artaxerxes, the king of Persia. When he heard of the desolate state of Jerusalem, though a part of the captives had returned, and the temple was rebuilt, he says, "I sat down and wept, and prayed before the God of heaven." He did not pray in vain. God moved the heart of his heathen master to send him to Jerusalem, with every requisite facility for the restoration of that ancient city, "the city of the great king," which had formerly been the theatre of many wonderful events, and was destined to be the scene of the most stupendous of all events, the death of the Son of God. (Neh. i. 4 ; ii. 4, 6.)

Among the instructions given by our blessed Lord to His disciples relative to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, there is one which places in an impressive light the duty of prayer for providential interposition. He said, "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand :) then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains." "And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days ! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath-day." (Matt. xxiv. 15, 16, 19, 20.) By "the abomination of desolation" we understand the standards of the Roman army. They are so called because they were objects of idolatrous worship, as well as means of destruction. The movements of the Roman army were under the direction of the Roman government, and both were under the control of Almighty God. The Christians are therefore directed to pray to Him, that the final attack upon Jerusalem might be so ordered that they

should not be compelled to flee from the devoted city during the "winter," lest delicate mothers, little children, sick and aged people, should perish in the cold; nor yet on the Sabbath-day, because they would be unable in this case to pay due respect to that sacred institution. Why should the people pray that they might be exempted from these distressing inconveniences, but because senates, governments, and the commanders of armies, are all in the hand of God, and under His control; and because He hears the supplications of His people, and will interpose in their behalf when they call upon Him? The affairs of the world, according to the teaching of our Saviour, are materially affected by the prayers of good men, which are often presented in the seclusion of the closet, and by persons of no public distinction; but they are not the less available on this account.

The New Testament records many facts illustrative of the prevalence of prayer, when offered for temporal benefits. Among these we may, with propriety, place the successful applications which were made to our Saviour for the relief of human misery; for, as His miracles were wrought by the power of God, which He has taught us to regard as the one and undivided power of the Father and the Son, these applications were cases of true prayer. Such was that of the nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum; and who, coming to Jesus, "besought Him that He would come down, and heal his son." "The nobleman saith unto Him, Sir, come down ere my child die." The prayer was heard and answered. "Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth." (John iv. 47, 49, 50.) Such

was the application of another father in behalf of his son, who was tormented by an evil spirit. The broken-hearted man said, "If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us." Here also the request was granted. The child was relieved at once and for ever. (Mark ix. 22, 25.) No less successful was the prayer of Jairus, in behalf of his dying daughter. Jesus recalled the departed spirit, and reanimated the lifeless clay, to the great joy of a disconsolate family. (Luke viii. 41, 42, 54, 55.) An answer was also granted to the "woman of Canaan," who applied to Jesus in behalf of her daughter, who was "grievously vexed with a devil." Her prayer was, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David." "Lord, help me." Her faith was severely tested by delay; but at length Jesus said to her, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour." (Matt. xv. 22, 25, 28.)

When Herod had "killed James the brother of John with the sword," he imprisoned Peter, intending to put him also to death as soon as the feast of the passover was ended. Every precaution was used to prevent his escape. An angel had, a little while before, delivered the whole body of the apostles out of prison; (Acts v. 18, 19;) but now it seems to have been determined to guard against a similar disappointment, and make sure of the victim. Peter was therefore confined in a prison, containing its "wards" and an "iron gate;" sixteen soldiers were directed to watch him by turns, day and night, four in a company; "keepers before the door kept the prison;" and Peter was not only "bound with two chains," but by those chains was bound to two

soldiers. The Christians in Jerusalem were deeply concerned for the apostle, whose ministry the world greatly needed. "Prayer was" therefore "made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." His deliverance was delayed till within a few hours of the time appointed for his execution; so that space was given for the exercise of faith on the part of the church, whose prayers were continued day and night. At length an angel was sent by Him to whom all true prayer is addressed, and whose command all the armies of heaven obey. That heavenly messenger caused the chains to fall from Peter's hands, overpowered the keepers with sleep, opened the prison doors; and the liberated apostle went directly to the house of a Christian family, "where many were gathered together praying." (Acts xii. 1-12.)

St. Paul's voyage to Rome was singularly perilous and distressing. The ship in which he sailed contained two hundred and seventy-six persons. The mariners' compass was not then known; "neither sun nor stars in many days appeared" to direct their course; the ship was ungovernable because of the "tempestuous wind" that lay on them; the lightening of the ship by throwing overboard the cargo produced no relief; and at length "all hope that they should be saved was taken away." In this sad emergency it is not said that the apostle prayed either for himself or for the terrified people that were with him; but the sacred narrative clearly implies that he asked of God to interfere for their preservation. An angel appeared to him, and said, "Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." In other words, You shall all be preserved, and

come safely to land. But why is the preservation of the entire company spoken of as a gift to St. Paul, but because he had prayed for them, and God granted to him the desire of his heart? And so it was. After many an anxious day and night, the morning of their deliverance arrived; when they that "could swim cast themselves into the sea, and got to land: and the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land," wet and weary, and the natives in pity "kindled a fire because of the present rain, and because of the cold." (Acts xxvii. 20-44; xxviii. 2.)

With this array of Scripture facts before us, we see the encouragement that Christian people have, amidst the perplexities and dangers of life, to dismiss from their minds all anxious and unbelieving care, and, "in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving," to make their "requests known unto God;" assured that He is always near, and will, as He ever has done, sustain, protect, guide, and deliver all who honour Him by an entire confidence in His faithfulness and love. "Trust in Him at all times; ye people," of every age and rank, "pour out your heart before Him: God is a refuge for us." (Psalm lxii. 8.) Providential blessings are obtained by prayer, as well as the richer blessings of grace and glory. Prayer may not always be answered in the manner that even wise and good men may desire and expect; but by persons of that character it is never offered in vain.

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE PERMISSIVE PROVIDENCE OF GOD.

God has revealed His perfections and character in His word. He has there made Himself known, not only as possessed of almighty power, of boundless knowledge and wisdom, and as being omnipresent and eternal, but as also essentially good, benevolent, holy, and just. "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." (1 John i. 5.) "He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He." (Deut. xxxii. 4.) The seraphim before His throne continually do cry, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory." (Isai. vi. 3.)

The holiness and justice of God, as well as His goodness and love, are eminently manifest in His government of mankind, and in the provision which He has made for their salvation from sin and its penalty. He has given them a law, which, like Himself, is "holy, just, and good;" (Rom. vii. 12;) and when they had fallen into sin, so as to be both guilty and morally corrupt, He made provision by the sacrifice of the cross for the removal of their guilt, and for the sanctification of their nature by the gift of the Holy Ghost: and the precepts of the Gospel condemn sin in all its forms, and enjoin the strictest purity. Under grace, therefore, as

well as under the law, “the wages of sin is death ;” so that no man can live in the practice of it, and escape that dreadful penalty. The Lord is “of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity ;” (Hab. i. 13;) in proof of which His “wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” (Rom. i. 18.)

The question then arises, How are we to understand those numerous passages of Holy Scripture which connect the providence of God with acts which are undeniably sinful, and for which men are actually punished ? This is a question of some difficulty, and one concerning which opposite opinions have prevailed among professed Christians. We think, however, that it admits of an easy and intelligible answer upon Scripture principles ; and beyond these we would not venture to speculate. It would appear that in the apostolic times there were men who attempted to transfer the blame of their misconduct to their Maker ; and to whose impious tenets St. James supplied a decisive antidote in the well-known words : “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God : for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man : but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.” (James i. 13, 14.) If “no man” can justly say, “I am tempted of God” to commit sin ; then much less can he say with truth, I am compelled, or I am necessitated, by Him to commit it. In every instance, sin is the man’s own act ; and the blame of it rests upon himself, and upon himself only. God gives the law, and requires obedience to it ; and when obedience is refused, He is dishonoured and

offended ; for then His authority is disregarded and despised, and He inflicts punishment as an expression of His just wrath.

It is true, that, in consequence of the corruption of their nature, mankind are incapable of the required obedience, till they are saved from guilt, and created anew in Christ Jesus ; and into this state of reconciliation with God, and of personal holiness, the Gospel invites all the fallen race to enter through faith in the blood of the cross. “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin,” (or, “by a sacrifice for sin,”) “condemned sin in the flesh : that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (Rom. viii. 3, 4.) Hence we learn that by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ we not only receive the forgiveness of all past sin, but the gift of the Holy Ghost, imparting to us a new and holy nature ; so that “the righteousness of the law”—the obedience which the law requires, the obedience of holy love—is “fulfilled” in us, who having believed in Christ surrender ourselves to the guidance and aid of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, giving a right direction to all our desires, purposes, and actions. He writes the law of God upon the hearts of all true believers ; so that their prevalent dispositions are in accordance with its holy requirements.

To all who are brought into this blessed state of conformity to the law and will of God,—from which none are debarred but by their own obstinate impenitence and unbelief,—it is said, “He is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence

of His glory with exceeding joy ; ” (Jude 24;) and He will thus “ keep ” them, while they live in the spirit of humble dependence upon Him, in watchfulness, circumspection, and prayer. David prayed that he might be “ kept back from presumptuous sins ; ” (Psalm xix. 13;) St. Paul expressed his persuasion that the Lord would “ deliver ” him “ from every evil work ; ” (2 Tim. iv. 18;) and believers are said to be “ kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” (1 Peter i. 5.)

Examples confirmatory of this truth are placed before us in Holy Scripture, which often speaks of God as interfering to restrain men from sin, when under the pressure of temptation. David, at one eventful period of his life, was kept by the providence of God from a fearful act of vengeance, which he meditated in connexion with his less scrupulous companions. He and the men that were with him, when he was persecuted by Saul, befriended Nabal, by protecting his servants and property ; and, in return, being in want of food, they requested a portion from the ample provision which Nabal had made on the festive occasion of sheep-shearing. To this request Nabal returned an insolent and offensive answer ; and David and his men, provoked by the insult, rashly determined to take summary vengeance upon the man who denied their request, and returned their kindness with reproaches. For this purpose they took every man his sword, and entered upon their journey to Nabal’s house, when they were met by the wife of this rude and surly man ; and she, by her wise address, and a liberal present, completely subdued the angry warriors, and extorted from David the memorable thanksgiving : “ Blessed be

the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand." (1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.) It was at God's instigation, then, according to the apprehension of David, that Abigail was led to pursue the conciliatory course which issued in this favourable result; and He it was that induced David and his men to listen with respectful attention to her speech. To Him therefore was due the glory of keeping back these irritated men from a deed of blood, which, if perpetrated, would have brought upon them a fearful amount of guilt; for they intended to slay the whole family.

An example of providential interposition for the prevention of sin, equally remarkable, we have in the case of Abimelech, the king of Gerar, who took Sarah, the wife of Abraham, under an apprehension that she was an unmarried woman. "God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife." Abimelech's answer was, "In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands have I done this. And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against Me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her." (Gen. xx. 8-6.)

From these examples, and from the general tenor of Holy Scripture, we conclude that when men are in the main upright and sincere before God, intending to please Him, He will restrain them from sin in seasons

of temptation, by His providence and grace, and keep them in the path of duty; especially if they are self-diffident, and walk humbly before Him: for “pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” (Prov. xvi. 18.) When Peter denied his Lord, he was confident of his own strength, and regardless of the warning given him; and had David habitually prayed, as he once did, that God would not only keep him from “the great transgression,” but also cleanse him from “secret faults,” we can hardly think that he would have sinned as he did in the matter of Uriah. His prayer would have received a gracious answer. But when men cast off the fear of God, are confident of their own strength, and neglect prayer, they grieve the Holy Spirit, who partially withdraws His influence; and they then fall an easy prey to even the foulest temptations. One sin prepares the way for another. Unwatchfulness, self-confidence, and the neglect of prayer, are generally followed by open transgression.

We find, in fact, that whenever the Divine interference is spoken of in Holy Scripture, in connexion with the commission of sin, the parties concerned had provoked the Almighty by previous offences; and that He did nothing more than withhold His restraint from men who were bent upon evil. On this subject there is a peculiarity in the phraseology of Holy Scripture, which has not always been duly considered; and a meaning has been attached to particular texts which they were never intended to convey. It has been justly observed by John Howe, an unquestionable authority in the case, that in the inspired volume “God is said to do whatsoever creatures do; whatsoever second or

subordinate causes do, while He has them in His hand, or in His power, either to restrain or let loose their inclinations and natural tendencies as He pleaseth; though He do not prompt them to this or that thing."\*

The judicious Hooker also observes, that God "is said to cast them asleep whom He maketh not vigilant; to harden them whom He softeneth not; and to take away that which it pleaseth Him not to bestow." †

On this subject, also, Dr. Thomas Pierce, one of the most learned theologians of a learned age, has observed, "When God is said to harden men's hearts,—to deliver them up to a reprobate mind,—to send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie, and the like;—it is infinitely far from being meant of an efficacious impulse in God Almighty." "That all those verbs,—to harden, to blind, to deliver up, to send delusions, to deceive, and the like,—are by an ordinary Hebraism only permissive in signification, though active in sound, is placed without all controversy." ‡

Perhaps this form of expression may have been occasioned, in part at least, by the poverty of the Hebrew language, which contains no term that accurately expresses what is understood by simple permission: so that things which God did not choose absolutely to hinder, He is said to have done; although the very permission of them was a proof of His righteous displeasure, the parties having previously offended Him by acts of presumptuous transgression.

Examples of the forms of expression to which Howe, and Hooker, and Pierce refer, we have in such texts as

\* Howe's Sermons, vol. i., p. 348. Edit. 1744.

† Hooker's Works, vol. ii., p. 714. Edit. 1836.

‡ Pierce's Divine Purity Defended, pp. 66, 67. Edit. 1659.

the following :—“ O Lord, why hast Thou made us to err from Thy ways, and hardened our heart from Thy fear?” (Isai. lxiii. 17.) “ Ah, Lord God ! surely Thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace ; whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul.” (Jer. iv. 10.) “ And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet ; and I will stretch out My hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of My people Israel.” (Ezek. xiv. 9.) Our Saviour Himself adopted these forms of speech. Addressing His disciples, He said, “ Think not that I am come to send peace on earth : I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.” (Matt. x. 34–36.) The meaning certainly is, not that Christ designedly, or by any direct exertion of His power, stimulates the passions of bad men, causing them to hate and persecute His servants, and even to slay them with the “ sword ; ” but that the introduction of His religion into states and families would be followed by these results ; ungodly children persecuting their Christian parents, and ungodly parents persecuting their godly children, through their own innate hatred of spiritual religion ; and civil rulers, hostile to the truth, subjecting the followers of Christ to imprisonment and to martyrdom. That the Lord Jesus is not the Author of unholy strife, either in families, in the church, or in general society, is undeniable ; for He is the Prince of Peace ; He has pronounced peacemakers blessed ; the

professors of His religion are charged, as much as lieth in them, to live peaceably with all men ; and when His Gospel shall be spread through all nations, so as to have imbued all mankind with its spirit, wars will entirely cease, and men of every land will form one peaceful and happy brotherhood, every malignant passion being put under effectual restraint.

One of the most daring examples of wickedness recorded in Scripture is that of Pharaoh, whose heart God is said to have "hardened,"—a statement which has been an occasion of much perplexity to devout and thoughtful readers. Let us examine the case, and endeavour to ascertain the true meaning of the sacred record on this mysterious subject. Long before Moses was sent to Pharaoh, and demanded the liberation of the tribes of Israel, Pharaoh had shown himself to be one of the most cruel tyrants that ever swayed a sceptre, having grievously oppressed a helpless and unoffending people. It was under his direct sanction that the Israelites were required to labour beyond their strength, were miserably beaten for not performing impossibilities, and saw their infants daily murdered. When Moses went to him, and in the name of God demanded for them a brief respite from their oppressive toil,—for that was all that was asked in the first instance,—that they might perform an act of worship to the God of their fathers, "Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go ? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." (Exod. v. 2.) Here we have a man thoroughly hardened in guilt, dead to every feeling of humanity, and setting at defiance the God that made him. Surely there was no need of any

direct operation of God upon the heart of such a man to render it more callous than it was.

In the narrative which follows, containing an account of the plagues inflicted upon the Egyptians, it is said three times that Pharaoh hardened his own heart; six times that his heart was hardened; and nine times that the Lord hardened his heart. Pharaoh, hardened as he was, generally relented under the different plagues that were inflicted upon him and his people; but his hardness of heart invariably returned, when the plague was removed. The meaning, then, appears to be, that God hardened the corrupt and sinful heart of Pharaoh, not by any direct operation upon it, but by the removal of the calamities which produced his temporary relentings, and by partially withholding the restraining power of Divine grace, the operations of which this bad man had obstinately resisted. The withholding of that grace, and the consequent hardening of Pharaoh's heart, were not only means to an end, such as further displays of the Divine omnipotence, for the general benefit of mankind, but also the punishment of sin previously committed. His heart, when freed from the restraints which were imposed upon it by God, and especially by the removal of the judgments which He inflicted, returned to its former obduracy; and the Almighty pursued this course with this wicked man, and with the ungodly and immoral people who owned him as their king, that He might confound their miserable system of idolatry, and declare His own supremacy to all other nations throughout the world that had renounced their allegiance to Him, and adopted forms of idolatrous worship. From this time the people of Israel, dwelling alone in the

midst of the earth, were to be His "witnesses" in the world; and it was requisite that He should authenticate their mission by awful judgments and a great deliverance. In all this there is nothing inconsistent with the Divine perfections and character. "Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance" upon the oppressors of mankind, who also contemn His authority, and set Him at defiance? \*

It is worthy of observation, that according to another idiom of the Hebrew language, analogous to that we have now been considering, men are said to do the things which they authoritatively declare shall be done, although they themselves exert no agency whatever in the case. When Joseph was in prison, he interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's butler and baker; declaring that the one would be put to death, and the other restored to his place. In reporting this case afterwards to Pharaoh, the butler said, "And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was; me he restored unto mine office, and him he hanged." (Gen. xli. 13.) The meaning obviously is, not that Joseph, strictly speaking, either hanged the baker, or restored the butler; but that he announced the certainty of these events; for at that time Joseph was no judge, nor had he any authority in Pharaoh's court.

The same form of expression is used with respect to Jeremiah, on whose appointment to the prophetic office the Almighty said, "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant." (Jer. i. 10.) Jeremiah, personally considered, was a poor, helpless, persecuted man, sometimes

\* See note G, in the Appendix.

a friendless prisoner, without any power to effect national revolutions—to elevate one kingdom, to depress another, to control and direct governments, to change dynasties, and to determine the issues of war. But God said to him, “I have put My words in thy mouth;” and the prophet, by the utterance of these “words,” made known what God intended to do, both in the Jewish nation and in the surrounding countries. As the events followed the predictions of the prophet, he was said, according to a Hebrew idiom, to produce the events, though he was often nothing more than a sorrowful spectator of the calamities which he announced.

Our blessed Saviour used the same form of speech, when, having “breathed” on His apostles, He said unto them, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained.” (John xx. 22, 23.) The apostles, personally considered, never laid claim to the high prerogative here mentioned. They never professed to justify the ungodly, to cancel human guilt, to condemn individual men to perdition, and to adjudge others to eternal life. Their doctrine was, “It is God that justifieth;” and that God for Christ’s sake forgives the sins of penitent believers. But the apostles, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, were authorized to declare the terms of forgiveness; the certain forgiveness of all who comply with those terms; and the no less certain condemnation of all who wilfully and obstinately refuse compliance with them: and this authority our Saviour expresses according to a well-known idiom of the Jews’ language. It is no wonder, then, that God is

said to do that which He permitted men to do, when they had by their sins provoked Him to withdraw from them the restraints of His providence and grace. Inattention to Scripture forms of expression is one of the most fruitful sources of theological error.

Samson's marriage with a heathen woman, belonging to the original inhabitants of Canaan, was a direct violation of the law of God. He had said to His people, "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son." (Deut. vii. 3.) When Samson set his heart upon such an alliance, his parents attempted to dissuade him from the enterprise, and urged him to turn his attention to some daughter of Israel, as his future wife; but in this it is said, "His father and his mother knew not that it was of the Lord, that He sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel." (Judges xiv. 4.) The meaning, we apprehend, is, not that it was "of the Lord" that Samson should break His law; but that as Samson was bent upon this unholy connexion, and would not be satisfied without it, God would not interpose His power to prevent it, but would overrule it for good, as He often does the evil actions of bad men. To Samson and his family the consequences of this marriage were most disastrous, as might be expected; but it led to beneficial results so far as the people of Israel were concerned. At this time they suffered greatly under the oppressive dominion of the heathen, who still dwelt in the land. By means of this marriage Samson was brought into direct intercourse with these oppressors;

he destroyed their power, and liberated his own people, though he brought upon himself great dishonour, and even lost his life. Samson sinned, and endured the bitter penalty of his waywardness and folly ; but “it was of the Lord” to bring good out of the evil, by making it a means of relief to His suffering people.

The same view we apprehend is to be taken of the case of Shimei, whose wickedness, by the providence of God, was rendered a means of humiliation to David, after his great offence. Attended by faithful friends, the king fled from Jerusalem on the occasion of Absalom’s rebellion ; “and when king David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera : he came forth, and cursed still as he came. And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David : and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial : the Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned ; and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son : and, behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man. Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king ? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head. And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah ? so let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so ? And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants,

Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him.\* It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day." (2 Sam. xvi. 5-12.)

The invectives against David, uttered by this rude Benjamite, were evidently the emanations of a deeply malignant heart; and in many respects they were not true. David did reign in the "stead" of Saul; but he had not supplanted Saul, nor taken Saul's life. Saul forfeited his crown by disobedience to God's commands, and David, without ever seeking the honour, was Divinely appointed to succeed him; so that he was as much "the Lord's anointed" as Saul had ever been. He had indeed sinned in the matter of Uriah, and for that sin he was now suffering the penalty; but he had rendered services to his country, such as had never been rendered by any man since the time of Moses and of Joshua. He had subdued its enemies, and put his subjects in the possession of land which God had given them, but which they had never before been able to claim and occupy. He had improved the choral service of the sanctuary, and had furnished all the people with psalms to aid them both in their public and private devotions: and many of those psalms were prophetic, relating directly to the Messiah, whose appearing "all nations" were taught to expect and "desire." On these grounds David was entitled to general respect and gratitude; and in his sufferings he was an object of

\* See Note H, in the Appendix.

sympathy. To load him, therefore, with abuse, and especially to charge him with crimes which he had never committed, was directly immoral. It is therefore impossible, strictly and literally speaking, that God should have said, "Curse David," in the manner Shimei did "curse" him. The slanderous utterances of this Benjamite were not the dictates of the Holy Spirit. What then did David mean when he said, "Let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him?" The answer is, David felt that he deserved all the shame and dishonour he was then enduring; and God, who is everywhere present, and has power to control every person and every thing, knew what Shimei was doing, but would not interpose to lay the temper and tongue of this reviler under restraint, but permitted him to give expression to all that was in his heart against David; and yet held him responsible for his outrageous conduct. God can never command the violation of His own law; and Shimei afterwards confessed that in his treatment of David he had "sinned," and acted "perversely;" which could not be true, if he had acted under God's direction. (2 Sam. xix. 19, 20.) God's abandonment of Shimei to his malignant temper and licentious tongue proved to him a great calamity. It was doubtless the punishment of former sin: it involved him in great trouble; and at length it cost him his liberty and his life.

It is then so common in Holy Scripture to speak of God as actually doing that which He simply permits, and does not absolutely hinder men from doing, that this may be justly regarded as an idiom of eastern speech. God is said to have given Absalom his father's concu-

bines, when He did not absolutely hinder that profligate young man from adding to his other crimes that of incest, by which the sin of his father was openly punished ; but the act was a far greater injury to the son than to the father. David was simply dishonoured ; Absalom incurred a fearful amount of guilt.

A further illustration of this subject we have in the case of Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, of whose invasion of the Holy Land we have already spoken, as well as of the providential destruction of his army. In answer to the prayer of Hezekiah, the Almighty said, “I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.” (Isai. xxxvii. 7.) The manner of his death is recorded in the thirty-eighth verse of the same chapter. “It came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword ; and they escaped into the land of Armenia.” Now here was a double crime ; a direct violation of two distinct precepts of the moral law. Is it then possible that He whose command is, “Honour thy father and thy mother,” and, “Thou shalt do no murder,” should have stimulated these men to murder their own father ? Could He, the God of truth and holiness, have given the law, and then have necessitated, or even have prompted and urged, these men to break it, and thus despise His authority ? Certainly not. What then is meant when it is said, “I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land ?” The meaning, we apprehend, is simply this : That as Sennacherib had openly set the God of heaven at defiance, God, as the punishment of this guilty heathen, would withdraw His guardian care, and leave him in

the hands of these assassins. The father and the sons had all incurred the displeasure of God by previous sin. He would therefore no longer either guard the father's life, or restrain the murderous propensity of his sons ; and this abandonment of both, according to an idiom of the sacred language, is spoken of as the "cause" of Sennacherib's death. We may here take occasion to observe, that there are more parricides in the world than Adrammelech and Sharezer ; and, but for the patience and guardian care of the Almighty, many a father, who is now alive and well, would long since have fallen by the hand of a profligate son.

The sorest misery that can befall any man, or any number of men, next to actual perdition, is that of being given up by God to a course of sin, after a long and obstinate abuse of His mercy. In this case sin becomes its own punishment, and a state of righteous retribution begins even in this world. The habit of sin gains greater strength every day by indulgence, the heart grows more and more callous, and the work of conversion becomes increasingly difficult. The mind falls into a state of "deep sleep," its "eyes" are "closed;" (Isai. xxix. 10;) the parties become spiritually "blind," so as not to apprehend saving truth; (John xii. 40;) they become the willing and unconscious dupes of a "strong delusion," calling "evil good, and good evil;" thinking themselves to be "rich, and increased with goods, and" to "have need of nothing," while they are in reality "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." (2 Thess. ii. 11; Isai. v. 20; Rev. iii. 17.) To such a state the heads of the Jewish nation were given up after they had so interpreted "the commandments

of God" as to render them of "no effect," and had added to their other sins that of rejecting the claims of the Son of God, confirmed as these were by a ministry of unexampled wisdom, condescension, impressiveness, and power, and by miracles which could be wrought only by the hand of God. To them our Saviour said, in righteous indignation, when taking His leave of them, "Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." (Matt. xxiii. 32, 33, 38.)

To a people in this sad condition many passages of Holy Scripture are awfully applicable. "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee." (Jer. ii. 19.) "Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves." (Isai. iii. 9.) "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone." (Hosea iv. 17.) "I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her," (Eccles. vii. 26,) as the punishment of former sins, which have not been repented of and forsaken.

We perceive, then, that as in the act of "keeping the commandments of God" there "is great reward," so in the act of breaking them there is a terrible penalty. In the day of judgment an indelible seal, if we may so speak, will be impressed upon the character of every man; when it will be said by Him whose word is power, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is

holy, let him be holy still." (Rev. xxii. 11.) Something resembling this final decision, it would appear, takes place in this life, especially with respect to those who are incorrigibly wicked. We do not say that they are absolutely and finally abandoned by God ; for who dares thus to limit His mercy toward those whom He yet preserves alive, and to whom His ministers are commissioned to preach His Gospel ? But we must and do say that the state of such persons is one of great peril, and one of which it is the duty of every man to be afraid. The men who have long lived in sin, and are given up to the unrestrained practice of it, are on the verge of hell.

On this subject one of the most learned of our old divines has expressed himself with great earnestness and fidelity. He says it is the usual method of the Almighty, not only to "punish one sin with another, but many times the same sin with itself, giving up him that will be filthy to be filthy still : which is certainly an argument that sin is not only the parent of some punishments, and sister to others ; but that of all sorts of punishments, on this side hell more especially, sin itself is the greatest. Thus when Pharaoh hardened his heart, God, withdrawing His grace, and giving him over to his temptations, left him so wholly to himself, as to make it yet harder ; which was to punish obduracy with obduracy. Thus when some chief persons in Israel were so admirably sinful, that their very righteousness was abominable, their very obedience as bad as rebellion, and their very sacrifices to be expiated ; when they delighted in their abominations, as if they would unparadise themselves in hell ; and had chosen

their own ways as more lovely and eligible than the ways of God ; God did threaten to be revenged in these plain words : ‘ I also will choose their delusions ; ’ or, as the margin hath it, ‘ their devices.’ (Isai. lxvi. 3, 4.) And so we see God punished their own ways with their own ways, their choice with their choice, their delusions with their delusions.” “ Men are said to be given up to their vile affections, when, for having forsaken God, they are so forsaken by God as to give place to their affections, to be absolutely conquered by them ; not that God is their tempter or driver on into sin, as some have too much mistaken such texts of Scripture. Again said God by the prophet Ezekiel, ‘ Because I have purged thee, and thou wouldest not be purged,’ thy punishment is, that ‘ thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more : ’ it being a much more fearful thing to fall *out* of God’s hands than to fall *into* them. Indeed we are not only told by the Master of the Sentences, that our later sins do execute a kind of judgment upon our former ; but a great deal better even by Seneca himself : That the first and greatest punishment of any commission of sin is the sin itself which is committed : insomuch that, although there were no hell at all, it were a kind of damnation to be a sinner.”\*

Our investigations thus far will prepare us to take a just view of those passages of the Old Testament which speak of God as giving to the apostate tribes of Israel the abominable rites of heathen worship, and as openly defiling the temple which had been built under His direction, and of which He had taken a formal possession.

\* Pierce’s Sinner Impleaded in his own Court, pp. 5–7. Edit. 1679.

Thus He speaks by the prophet Ezekiel : “ Because they had not executed My judgments, but had despised My statutes, and had polluted My sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers’ idols : wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live ; and I polluted them in their own gifts, in that they caused to pass through the fire all that openeth the womb, that I might make them desolate, to the end that they might know that I am the Lord.” (Ezek. xx. 24–26.) The meaning simply is, that when the people of Israel, the covenant people of God, renounced His worship, adopted the idols of the heathen, murdered their first-born children in honour of their false deities, and obstinately disregarded all His warnings and calls to repentance, He gave them up to these abominable practices as their punishment ; \* so that, at length, finding themselves involved in misery, which their idols could neither remove nor alleviate, they might repent of their sin and folly, and return to the God of their fathers, as being alone worthy of their confidence and homage. He never imposed upon them the miserable rites of heathenism ; but when they had adopted such rites, and would not be reclaimed, He withdrew His prophets and His protection, and sent them into captivity in a heathen land, where they were impressively taught that “ an idol is nothing in the world ; ” and that the true wisdom of mankind consists in the strict observance of the first command of the Decalogue : “ Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.”

The Jews set a high value upon their temple at Jeru-

\* See Note I, in the Appendix.

salem ; and, as the punishment of their sin, God said to them, " I will profane My sanctuary, the excellency of your strength, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pitieh." (Ezek. xxiv. 21.) The meaning is, not that God, by any direct interposition of His power, would profane the house that was erected for His worship, where He had dwelt, and often manifested His presence and favour ; but that He would withdraw His protection from the Hebrew people on account of their flagrant wickedness, and allow heathen men to demolish the sacred fabric, put an end to its religious services, and carry away its treasures into a strange land. On another occasion, speaking on the same subject, He said, " I will give it into the hands of the strangers for a prey, and to the wicked of the earth for a spoil ; and they shall pollute it. My face will I turn also from them, and they shall pollute My secret place : for the robbers shall enter into it, and defile it." (Ezek. vii. 21, 22.) With this threatening agrees the sacred history. " The king of the Chaldees," at the head of his army, seized " all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord ; " " and they burnt the house of God." (2 Chron. xxxvi. 17-19.) Here again, then, God is spoken of as doing that which in His displeasure He permitted wicked men to do ; refusing to restrain them by His power. They intended nothing but the gratification of their covetous desires. By withholding His restraint, He intended to punish His unfaithful people.

The subject is elucidated by the accounts which are given of previous invasions of the Holy Land, which, being permitted by God as national judgments, the

punishment of sin, are spoken of as the direct effects of His own interposition. When Solomon, for instance, in the latter years of his life, sinned by his unbounded sensuality, and by the abominable idolatry which he openly patronized and practised, "the Lord was angry" with him, and not only threatened to divide his kingdom, but withdrew His protection, and, it is said, "stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite." "And God stirred him up another adversary, Rezon the son of Eliadah." "He was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon, beside the mischief that Hadad did." (1 Kings xi. 9, 14, 23, 25.) Solomon gave up the worship of God for the worship of idols; and God permitted idolaters to invade his kingdom, dishonour his government, and thus punish him for his sin.

Disasters still greater, and for the same reason, took place under the permissive providence of God, in the time of Rehoboam, the unwise son of backsliding Solomon. He lost a majority of his subjects by his rashness and folly, and "forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him." "Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the Lord;" not that he regarded the transgression, or had any concern for the honour of God. He was bent only upon plunder; and Jerusalem, immediately after the wealth that had been accumulated in the reign of Solomon, promised a large booty. His army was formidable. He had "twelve hundred chariots, and three score thousand horsemen: and the people were without number that came with him out of Egypt; the Lubims, the Sukkiims, and the Ethiopians. And he took the

fenced cities which pertained to Judah, and came to Jerusalem. Then came Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam, and to the princes of Judah, that were gathered together at Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said unto them, Thus saith the Lord, Ye have forsaken Me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak." (2 Chron. xii. 1-5.) On receiving this message, these offenders humbled themselves before the Lord, and in answer to their cries, under the pressure of the invasion, He granted them "some deliverance;" so that the ruin of the city and temple was not complete. Yet the invaders were permitted by God to take away immense "treasures" from His "house," which Solomon had placed there; withdrawing His protection from His faithless people, and leaving them in the hands of these selfish heathens.

The doctrine of God's permissive providence, as it is stated in the sacred writings, is strikingly exemplified in the accounts which are given of the fallen angels, whose character and works, considered in themselves, are exclusively evil. These miserable and wicked beings are the enemies of God and men. They are unquestionably under His control, for He holds them in "chains of darkness;" yet they exert an agency in the affairs of men. Such agency, of course, can only be put forth under His permission, sometimes as the punishment of sin in men, and sometimes as a test of character; but never beyond the appointed limits. God "made a hedge about" Job's person, family, and property, through which Satan confessed himself unable to pass without the Divine permission. When that permission was granted, for the trial of the good man, Satan

secured the death of Job's children, the destruction of his property, and afflicted Job himself with a sore disease. As these calamities were inflicted by God's permission, they are, in accordance with the general phraseology of Scripture, ascribed to God Himself. "Shall we receive good at the hand of God," said the patient sufferer, "and shall we not receive evil?" (Job ii. 10.) "God hath delivered me to the ungodly, and turned me over into the hands of the wicked. I was at ease, but He hath broken me asunder: He hath also taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for His mark." (Job xvi. 11, 12.) "But He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." (Job xxiii. 10.) In this case the evil spirit, under the Divine permission, exerted his malignant agency to the utmost limit of his power. His desire and intention were the utter ruin of "a perfect and upright man." God's design in granting the permission was the trial of Job's faith and patience, and the exhibition of a great moral lesson to mankind. For who hath not "heard of the patience of Job," and "seen" the happy "end" to which "the Lord" brought the unparalleled sufferings of His faithful servant? (James v. 11.)

When Saul, by his unfaithfulness in his kingly office, had so offended the Lord, that it was determined the crown should not descend to any of his children, but be transferred to another family, we read that "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him." (1 Sam. xvi. 14.) It was a part of Saul's punishment, that by God's permission an evil spirit came upon him, especially at particular times,

rendering him melancholy, restless, jealous, malignant, and revengeful ; so that he became a terror to himself, his family, and attendants. From the misery thus inflicted upon him he obtained partial and temporary relief by music, and probably by other appliances : but he remained an unhappy man to the day of his death ; an evil spirit, by God's permission, being his tormentor.

David's military success, it would appear, proved a snare to him and to the Hebrew people, leading them to trust in their numbers and valour rather than in the guardian care of Almighty God, which was their true defence. It was probably this feeling that induced David to direct an exact census to be taken of all the men in Israel that were able to bear arms. This unhappy measure, as we have already observed, so displeased the Lord, that He sent a pestilence among the people, thus impressively teaching the survivors that their national strength and safety lay not in the number of their fighting men, but in the providence of God. There is an apparent discrepancy in the statements of Scripture, as to the original instigator of this census. "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." (2 Sam. xxiv. 1.) In another place we read, "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel." (1 Chron. xxi. 1.) The two statements are easily reconciled upon the principle of God's permissive providence. "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel," on what account we are not directly informed, but most probably because of a national vanity and confidence ; for the census was

clearly a military one. (2 Sam. xxiv. 9.) Satan, always bent upon evil, and watching for every opportunity of mischief, incited David to fall into the national feeling of self-confidence ; and God, in just displeasure, permitted Satan to tempt, and David to fall into the snare. He then gave His people, and David at the head of them, a terrible rebuke ; making them feel their helplessness, and consequent dependence upon Him. David gave the command to number Israel ; and, when smarting under the chastisement of the Almighty, was willing to take the entire blame upon himself : but it is clear from the sacred narrative that he was not the only offender in the case. "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel," as well as against David ; so that they were partakers of his sin.

The Hebrew prophets were a remarkable order of men, such as the world has scarcely ever seen besides. They were raised up by the special providence of God at the various periods of the Jewish commonwealth, and sent by Him with messages to the people. They were no time-servers, but examples of fidelity ; addressing their warnings, reproofs, and admonitions to all classes of the community, without respect of persons. They reproved kings, princes, magistrates, priests, and the common people ; leaving the issue with God. Their messages were often unwelcome, especially when they foretold approaching judgments ; so that they were often severely persecuted. Other men, therefore, wishful to gain popular favour, assumed the character of prophets, and adapted their announcements to the prejudices and feelings of the parties whom they addressed. These parties, gratified with flattery, and an assurance

of safety, often patronized the false prophets, and frowned upon the men whom God had sent. "This is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord : which say to the seers, See not ; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits." (Isai. xxx. 9, 10.) "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land ; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means ; and My people love to have it so : and what will ye do in the end thereof ?" (Jer. v. 30, 31.)

The Holy Scriptures connect this state of things with the permissive providence of God. When the false prophets had long exercised His patience, by uttering in His name "smooth things," lies of their own invention, He gave them up to their evil practices ; and when the people preferred these deceits to His truth, He left them to their own destructive delusions ; taking the deceivers in their own craftiness, and the deceived in their sin. "If the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet ; and I will stretch out My hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of My people Israel." (Ezek. xiv. 9.) "With Him is strength and wisdom : the deceived and the deceiver are His." (Job xii. 16.) Both are under His control and governance.

Nearly allied to these false prophets, who professed to speak in the name of the true God, were the prophets of Baal, and of other heathen deities. Ahab, who was addicted to idolatry, summoned four hundred men bearing this character, to whom he proposed the question, "Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle,

or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king." Micaiah, a prophet of God, was then consulted; and he said, "Behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee." (1 Kings xxi. 6, 23.) The infatuated king, willing to be deceived, and having already renounced the worship of the God of his fathers, ordered Micaiah to be shut up in prison, and went to Ramoth-gilead, where he was killed in battle, and was brought home a dead man, instead of returning "in peace," as he fondly expected. When it is said, "The Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets," the meaning clearly is, that as these men had apostatized from God, and given themselves up to the worship of devils, He abandoned them to the evils they had perversely chosen; and they and the king were alike by wicked spirits deceived to their ruin. Their abandonment to "lying spirits" was the punishment of sin previously committed.

The case of the demoniacs of the New Testament appears to have borne a near resemblance to that of Saul, the unfaithful king of Israel; yet they were not exactly alike. The "evil spirit" that "troubled" Saul was sent as the penalty of personal transgression; but some of the demoniacs were thus "troubled" from their childhood, before they were capable of actual sin. Saul appears also to have had seasons of relief; but we have no intimations of any such intervals in respect of the demoniacs, some of whom were "grievously tormented," both in mind and body; being deprived of speech, of hearing, of self-control, inspired with mischievous

propensities, and even driven from human society. From these bodily affections Saul was also happily exempt.

The question naturally arises, Why were these cases of diabolical possession so numerous in the Holy Land in the time of our Lord, and not at other times and in other places? Without pretending to know all the reasons for this part of the Divine conduct, we may suggest,—

1. It was of the utmost importance that, in connexion with the Gospel revelation, mankind should understand the true character of Satan, and of the legions of fallen angels associated with him in attempting the ruin of our race. It is not as a matter of mere speculation, and much less of amusement, that Christians are warned of the existence of these unseen adversaries, to whose wiles and assaults all are alike liable. Satan was “a murderer from the beginning;” and his thoroughly malignant character is exhibited in those parts of the Gospel history which describe the condition of the unhappy persons whom he and his infernal confederates were allowed to torment. To rescue mankind from the power of the devil was one object of Christ’s manifestation in the flesh; and to be delivered from such a power is no light mercy. The men who are thus rescued should beware of ever again forming a league with him, by entertaining his projects in respect of erroneous doctrine, or of sinful practice. All who live in sin are confederate with him. They are “the children of the wicked one,” and are of their “father the devil,” (Matt. xiii. 38; John viii. 44,) with whom they will for ever perish. To maintain a

ceaseless and determined war with him is every man's calling and interest.

2. The relief of the demoniacs by our Saviour Christ demonstrates His power over these enemies of mankind. They quailed before Him in the days of His humiliation ; they fled from His presence, and at the sound of His voice ; and they could not even enter into the swine till they had obtained His permission ; nor can they tempt any one beyond the limits He has assigned. He was " manifested to destroy the works of the devil ; " as His Gospel spreads among the nations of the earth, Satan's power declines ; he is bruised under the feet of every true believer ; and in the last day he and his legions will be condemned by the Almighty Son of God to the misery assigned to them, especially as the adversaries of the human race, whom He has redeemed, and whose blood He will thus avenge.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE OVERRULING PROVIDENCE OF GOD.

IN nothing are the wisdom and goodness of God more strikingly manifest, than in rendering the evil actions of men and of the fallen angels subservient to His own glory, and the fulfilment of His own holy and gracious purposes. Examples of this kind abound in Holy Scripture; they may be distinctly traced in the history of the church and of the world, and in the events of daily life: they engage the attention of thoughtful persons, and deepen their impression of an overruling providence. Acts of declared opposition to the truth of God are often rendered a means of its wider diffusion, and of recommending it to the practical attention of mankind; and acts of hostility to individual men are often made to advance their interests.

The first and most obvious instance of this kind that offers itself to our attention is that of the original transgression. By the instigation of that old serpent, the devil and Satan, our first parents were drawn from their allegiance to God, forfeited the enjoyment of all good, dishonoured their Maker and Lawgiver, and brought a malediction upon themselves, their posterity, and the earth on which they dwelt. Their fall appeared to be the triumph of the wicked one; but this was of short

duration, for the scheme of redemption was prepared beforehand, and was immediately brought into operation. By this scheme, blessings more rich and numerous are provided for mankind than were lost by transgression; and the glory that redounds to God surpasses all thought. The moral attributes of God, His wisdom, grace, mercy, patience, longsuffering, holiness, and justice, are seen in their brightest manifestations; and the fact that there is a Trinity of Persons in the Divine Unity appears in the perfection of its evidence. In love to mankind the Father gives His glorious and co-eternal Son as their Redeemer and Saviour; the Son, in compliance with His Father's will, and in compassion to mankind, assumes their nature, and submits to die in their stead; and the Holy Spirit, in honour of Christ, comes down from heaven to apply the benefits of redemption, and to carry on His operations in the church and the world till the end of time. With the revelation of this great mystery the worship of the church is in exact correspondence, while her members exclaim with united hearts and voices, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost!"

But for the fall, there would have been no incarnation of the Son of God; no display of redeeming love; no gift of the Holy Ghost as a Comforter and Sanctifier; no mediatorial government of the world, exhibiting the grace and mercy of God in combination with His justice; no "noble army of martyrs;" no meekness under injuries, fortitude in the endurance of pain, patience in sickness, contentment in poverty, no heroic daring in times of persecution, no deeds of charity to the poor, no visitation of the prisoner and the afflicted, no holy resig-

nation in death, by which God is so eminently glorified, and His servants secure a great and eternal reward ; no such song in heaven as “ Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour.” Nor could it have been said, that “ every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea,” unite in the song, “ Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.” (Rev. v. 12, 13.) Such is the essential goodness of God, and such are the resources of His wisdom, that even the fall of man has led to the revelation of

“ Love without end, and without measure grace.”

Of the overruling providence of God the history of Joseph, to which we have already referred, forms an instructive example, as well as of righteous retribution. His elevation and consequent usefulness were brought about by means, most of which were directly criminal. As a son of Rachel, the favourite wife of Jacob, who died in giving birth to her second child, he was an object of his father’s strong affection ; and that affection was greatly increased by the tender filial spirit of Joseph, one of whose most prominent characteristics was a reverent love for his father. Jacob’s special regard for Joseph was therefore natural and justifiable ; but the manner in which he expressed it was, to say the least, indiscreet. It provoked a feeling of envy in his brothers ; and that feeling ripened into bitter malice, so that they agreed to murder him, but at length satisfied themselves by selling him into the hands of

strangers, who sold him a second time. Then followed the foul accusation of his mistress, his imprisonment, and the inexcusable conduct of a fellow-prisoner, who, having obtained his own liberty, "did not remember Joseph, but forgat him." Here, then, we have a series of criminal acts, all tending in themselves to the ruin of Joseph; yet so overruled by Divine Providence as to bring about his advancement and honour, and to render him one of the greatest benefactors to mankind that ever lived. He was a means of preserving alive his own family, who were the chosen people of God, and of supplying famishing millions with bread.

In all this he justly acknowledged the hand of God, and taught others to acknowledge it. Addressing his brothers, now humbled, ashamed, and terrified, he said, "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life." "God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and He hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not." (Gen. xlvi. 5, 7-9.)

Are we then to understand that God was a party to the murderous hostility of Joseph's brethren? to the heartless sale of their brother? to the sale of him in Egypt by the selfish Ishmeelites? to the vile accusation of his mistress? or that God approved of all these acts, which were connected with Joseph's advancement?

The answer is, Not at all. They were transgressions of His holy law, and among the “abominable things that” He “hateth;” and He held the guilty parties answerable for these their misdoings. Nor were any of these sinful actions necessary in order to the accomplishment of God’s purposes of mercy in connexion with the famine which then prevailed. He does not need even the wisdom of men in order to the fulfilment of His plans; and much less does He need their sins; for the resources of His wisdom are endless, and His power is infinite. He overruled for good the envy and malice of Jacob’s sons; and He overruled for good the infamous falsehood of Joseph’s mistress; but He approved of neither, and He needed neither. It was kind and generous in Joseph, and natural in his circumstances, when he saw the confusion and terror of his brothers, and was himself possessed of vast wealth and power, to say, “Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither;” but it was their duty to be “grieved,” and “angry with themselves,” for what they had done, and that to the end of their lives. The truth is, that Joseph’s brethren, properly speaking, did not send him to Egypt. They sold him to a company of strangers, who took him with them to Egypt; but when they had bought him, they might have taken him to any other country, or have done with him what they pleased. But for God’s merciful interposition, Joseph might have been a wretched slave in a heathen land to the day of his death. His brothers had no regard for his welfare. They got rid of him, and pocketed his price, and cared for nothing more. The evil connected with Joseph’s elevation was all human, the good was all Divine. Even

the forgetfulness of the chief butler was overruled for good. He remembered Joseph at the exact time when he was able to render the most valuable service to the friendless prisoner whom he had left in chains ; and an earlier remembrance of him, according to our apprehensions, would not have been followed by consequences equally beneficial, either to Joseph, to his family, or to the world.

Great, as we have seen, was the sin of David, and terrible was the punishment that followed it ; and, with respect to both, we observe the interference of a wise and gracious Providence bringing good out of evil. How many men, bent upon sinning in the same manner have been warned by his punishment, and have kept themselves pure, will be seen in the day when the secrets of all hearts are disclosed. But it is not so much in the Scripture history, which describes the punishment of the royal offender, as in the Psalms which he wrote on the occasion, that we see his sin overruled for the good of mankind. Perhaps no part of Holy Scripture is more frequently read, especially by devout people, than the Psalms of David ; and here "the sighings of a contrite heart" are expressed, "sighings" that were uttered at every remembrance of his sin till the end of his life : for it never could cease to be with him matter of shame and humiliation before God. Since that sin was committed, and those Psalms were written, nearly three thousand years have passed away ; and during this long period those Psalms have been read with spiritual profit in families, in public religious assemblies, and by individuals in their closets. They set forth the true nature of repentance, and supply the most appropriate terms in

which a broken heart may utter its sorrows, deprecate the wrath of the offended Lawgiver, and ask the blessing of forgiveness. In the future ages of the world, till the end of time, the Psalms that David wrote on the occasion of his sin will by the good providence of God answer these important purposes. They will indeed become more and more useful as true religion increases in the world, and nation after nation, enlightened by Gospel truth, shall be brought under the awakening and converting power of the Holy Spirit. Without the penitential Psalms of David we should feel that even the Scriptures are incomplete. The penitent confessions and wailings of David have already been made a blessing to tens of thousands; they are made a blessing daily; and they will be a blessing to millions yet unborn. How admirable, then, is the providence which brings such an amount of good out of evil!

It was a disadvantage to the Hebrew people that the land which they occupied bordered upon heathen countries; so that, unless they were guarded by the special providence of God,—a benefit which was secured to them by a conditional promise from Him, but which they often forfeited by their national sins,—they were liable to perpetual annoyance and depredations from their lawless neighbours, bent upon plunder, and ever ready to steal men, women, and children, as well as corn and cattle. For children, it seems, these kidnappers found a ready market within their own borders; and “a little maid,” brought away as a captive out of the land of Israel, by a band of thieves, became a slave in the family of Naaman, the Syrian general, where she witnessed the miserable condition of her master, suffer-

ing from one of the most dreadful of all maladies, the Eastern leprosy. Though he held her in bondage, she desired to see him relieved of that frightful disease. The theft and captivity of this child, torn from her parents, her family, and the land of her birth, and compelled to live among idolaters, were to her a great injury and a wrong; and in the sight of God they were great sins; yet by Him they were overruled for good. A casual observation, made by her in the hearing of her mistress, led to a miraculous cure of the afflicted man, by the instrumentality of a Hebrew prophet; and that cure was the means of leading him to an abandonment of the idolatry of his country, and of inducing him to acknowledge the God of heaven as the only object of Divine worship. What influence his example had upon the king of Syria, and upon the Syrian nation generally, we know not; but it will be seen in the day of final account. This is not the only case in which God has been pleased to accomplish important ends by a feeble and unpromising instrumentality, so that no flesh may glory in His presence. "A little maid," stolen from her parents, becomes a mighty benefit to a great military commander, and of spreading the knowledge of God among a heathen people. The theft of this friendless child was a great crime; but God in His eternal mercy overruled it for good. (2 Kings v. 2-17.)

The waywardness and disobedience of the prophet Jonah were criminal in a high degree. Instead of fulfilling his mission to Nineveh, he "fled from the presence of the Lord," and embarked in a ship for Tarshish. A watery grave was assigned to him by his fellow-voyagers, as the penalty of his sin, and the means of their pre-

servation ; but God had mercy on him, and preserved him by miracle ; and in this manner corrected the perverseness of His servant, furnished a type of the resurrection of His Son, and authenticated the commission of the prophet. It was hardly to be expected that the "men of Nineveh" would credit the preaching of a stranger, unless it were attended by some miraculous proof that God had sent him. That proof was supplied by the wonderful preservation of Jonah, which was "a sign" to the Ninevites, and was, doubtless, one principal cause of his success. Here again, then, we have an example of the overruling providence of God, in bringing good out of evil. Death by drowning was intended by the seamen to be the punishment of Jonah's sin ; but God interposed to preserve the guilty man, to bring him to repentance, to convince the Ninevites that He had sent him, and to supply a type of the resurrection of Christ, which is the crowning evidence of His Messiahship. "As Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of Man be to this generation." (Luke xi. 30 ; Jonah i. 3, 17 ; ii. 10 ; Matt. xii. 39, 40.)

One of the most important events connected with the history of the Jews was the Babylonian captivity, which took place about six hundred years before the coming of our Lord. The temple was burned, the fortifications of Jerusalem were demolished, and the treasure that was found in the temple, in the palace of the king, and in the hands of private individuals, Nebuchadnezzar and his army seized as their booty. The truth is, plunder was their object, and of that they obtained a large amount. So far as they were concerned, the invasion of the Holy Land, the destruction of God's house, and

the slavery of the people, were purely evil, acts of direct injustice, of theft, and of unmerited violence. Yet these atrocious sins, committed by a heathen people, were overruled for good by Him whose judgments are a great deep, and who maketh the selfshness and cupidity, as well as the wrath, of man to praise Him.

Through this sore judgment, of which the prophets had given repeated warning, three great objects were brought about by the good providence of God. The Jews were effectually humbled; their national pride was mortified; and they were made deeply to feel their dependence upon God, and their accountableness to Him.

They were also effectually cured of their propensity to idolatry, a sin to which they had been fearfully addicted from the time of their emancipation from Egypt, and by which they had greatly dishonoured the God of their fathers. By a residence of seventy years in Babylon, where they saw idolatry in all the grossness of its superstition, and the intensity of its folly and misery, they became decided in their attachment to the worship of God according to the law of Moses, and as a nation never more bowed the knee to a heathen deity. Their worship was often formal and hypocritical, and their conduct immoral; but they abhorred idols, as they do to this day.

A third benefit which arose out of this national calamity was the wide diffusion of sound religious knowledge in the heathen world. Daniel and his three noble companions in Babylon, and Mordecai in Persia, obtained offices of dignity and trust in the administration of government, and boldly asserted the unity and supremacy of God, in opposition to all the idols of the heathen; and other men of inferior note, but of earnest

piety, doubtless bore a similar testimony in private life. In Persia "many of the people of the land became Jews," in the sense of embracing the Jews' religion. (*Esther viii. 17.*) It is also highly probable that other persons, in the wide extent of the Babylonian empire, did the same, convinced by the power of truth, which the Jews did not fail to disseminate. To convert heathen people from the worship of idols to the knowledge and service of the true and living God is a benefit, the full value of which it will require eternity to disclose.

In this manner did it please God, in His infinite mercy, to bring good out of evil; causing benefits of unutterable magnitude and importance to arise from an outbreak of national selfishness and ambition; for such, unquestionably, was the true character of the expedition of Nebuchadnezzar and his army against Jerusalem in the time of Zedekiah. (*2 Chron. xxxvi.*)

The overruling providence of God may be distinctly seen in the entire history of our Saviour. We see it in the place of His birth, in His temptation, in His ministry, in His sufferings, and in His resurrection from the dead. "There went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed," or "enrolled;" and as the Holy Land was then included in the Roman "world," Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem in compliance with the imperial mandate. This enrolment, required by a heathen man, had a merely secular purpose; but it led to the fulfilment of a prophecy, which had been delivered more than seven hundred years before. The prophecy says, "Thou Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the

thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting," or "from the days of eternity;" (Micah v. 2;) and, according to the history, "Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea," in consequence of the imperial decree. (Matt. ii. 1; Luke ii. 1-6.)

When He was about thirty years of age, He came to John for the purpose of being baptized; and immediately after the administration of that ordinance, He "was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil," "and was with the wild beasts." Three of His temptations are specified; but we have no reason to believe that they were the only ones that were proposed to Him. That they were to Him a cause of great suffering, is clearly indicated; for during the forty days and nights of their continuance "He did eat nothing." Nor is this matter of surprise; for He was urged to tempt God, and even to worship the devil. The object of the tempter was essentially evil; but who can estimate the amount of good which, by the overruling providence of God, was brought out of this mysterious transaction? The Lord Jesus was thus prepared to act the part of a merciful and faithful High Priest to the end of the world: "for in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted." (Heb. ii. 18.) In the firm and decided resistance which our Saviour offered to Satan, Christians have an example, which they are bound and encouraged to imitate. They are also shown, and that in a manner the most impressive, the use which they are to make of the Holy Scriptures. They are to

regard them as the undoubted word of God, the rule of conduct from which they are never to deviate, and the standard of truth by which they are to try every suggestion, come from what quarter it may. Every tenet and every spirit must be tried by that which has been "written" under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. (Luke iv. 1-13; Mark i. 13.)

In the exercise of His ministry our Saviour had to "endure the contradiction of sinners," as well as the folly and waywardness of His disciples; but even these evils were overruled for good, so that some of the most important elements of His doctrine were called forth in the reproof of sin and the correction of error. "The mother of Zebedee's children," prompted by her sons and by a foolish ambition, requested that they might have the pre-eminence in His kingdom, thus provoking the indignation of the other disciples. On receiving this application, He uttered the very important lesson, illustrative of the spirit of His religion: "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." (Matt. xx. 26, 27.) The value of this lesson is inestimable; and the practical observance of it is essential to the peace of the church.

When certain "spies" came to Him, "feigning themselves" to be "just men," intending, if possible, to bring Him into collision with the government, asking whether or not it was "lawful" in the sight of God for the Jews to pay tribute to the Romans, He distinctly recognised the rights of Caesar, as well as the rights of God; and thus taught His followers that subjection to the civil power is a permanent duty, which on no

account they must attempt to evade. (Luke xx. 19-26.)

When the Pharisees "derided Him" for recommending the application of wealth to pious and charitable objects, (being themselves "lovers of money,") He reproved their worldliness, and checked their levity, by placing before them the case of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man had plenty of money, which he for a short time expended upon himself in splendid apparel and luxurious feasting,—and then he lifted up his eyes in endless torment. Lazarus had no money; and, after a brief period of want and disease, was carried by the angels of God to the bosom of Abraham, there to remain in security and happiness for ever. The rich man had made with his money no "friends" to "receive" him "into everlasting habitations;" nor could his money obtain for him a drop of water to cool his parched tongue. In this manner was the impious derision of a body of profane men overruled for good, by calling forth lessons of solemn and everlasting moment. (Luke xvi. 14, 19-31.)

To "a certain lawyer," who "stood up and tempted Him," our Lord gave an answer which the man was unable to dispute. "But he, willing to justify himself," and unwilling to appear beaten in argument, proposed another question, to which he evidently thought our Lord could not give so ready a reply: "And who is my neighbour?" whom I am bound to love as I love myself. Jesus then delivered the parable of the good Samaritan; teaching that a man of another nation, a man belonging to a hostile nation, a man whose religious opinions and forms of worship are alike erroneous, a

man that worships he knows not what, is our neighbour, whom we are bound thus to love. This great lesson of morality and religion was elicited by the pertinacity and conceit of a vain man, who placed his feeble intellect in collision with the incarnate wisdom of God. (Luke x. 25-37.)

Our Saviour spake as never man spake ; yet he did not succeed upon all occasions in fixing the attention of His hearers. Once, when He was delivering a discourse on the providence of God, for the encouragement of His disciples, a man who was present was occupied in thinking of a wrong which he conceived to have been inflicted upon him by his brother, who had seized the whole of the family estate. In violation of all decency, the man interrupted the discourse, by rudely exclaiming, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me!" To this worldly-minded man, who was more concerned about the family "inheritance" than the salvation of his soul, and to all who were present, our Saviour answered, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness : for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." He then added, in the form of a parable, the case of a man who, having accumulated a large amount of wealth, said to his soul, "Thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry ;" when God cut him short with the terrible announcement, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee : then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided ?" (Luke xii. 13-21.)

In this manner it pleased God to bring good out of

evil in connexion with the ministry of His Son ; making the impertinence of cavillers and worldlings an occasion for teaching truths of everlasting importance to mankind.

These observations are as applicable to the sufferings of our Lord as they are to His ministry.

We cannot conceive of conduct more hateful and wicked than that which His adversaries adopted towards Him ; or of benefits more rich and enduring than those which result from His example and sufferings. Not satisfied with securing His condemnation to die under the charge of blasphemy, the Jews and the men whom they instigated subjected Him, before His crucifixion, to every kind of pain and dishonour. "Then did they spit in His face, and buffeted Him ; and others smote Him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophesy unto us, thou Christ : Who is he that smote Thee ?" (Matt. xxvi. 67, 68.) After Pontius Pilate had consented that He should be crucified, and had scourged Him, these insults were renewed. "The soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto Him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped Him, and put on Him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand : and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked Him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews ! And they spit upon Him, and took the reed, and smote Him on the head. And after that they had mocked Him, they took the robe off from Him, and put His own raiment on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him." (Matt. xxvii. 27-31.) "And many other things blasphemously spake they

against Him." (Luke xxii. 65.) "And Herod with his men of war set Him at nought, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him again to Pilate." (Luke xxiii. 11.) As He hung upon the cross, "the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided Him, saying, He saved others ; let Him save Himself, if He be the Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming to Him, and offering Him vinegar." "And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him." (Luke xxiii. 35, 36, 39.)

Malice more intense and bitter than that of the Jews toward the Lord Jesus, and contempt more profound and irritating than that of the Roman soldiers, it is impossible to imagine. And even one of the thieves caught the infection of their spirit, and spent his dying breath, not in prayer for mercy, but in reviling the Son of God. Yet these enormities, which can never be contemplated but with horror, were overruled for good, being a means of calling forth, for the imitation of mankind throughout all ages, a perfect example of meekness, self-possession, charity, and forgiveness, under provocations and injuries. When accused falsely, Jesus was silent ; when treated with contempt and scorn, He uttered no complaint ; and when suffering from the inflictions of wanton cruelty, He manifested toward His unfeeling persecutors the purest benevolence. He prayed, not for vengeance upon His enemies, but for the forgiveness of those who took pleasure in His pain, finding matter of amusement in the contumely and stripes which they inflicted upon Him. Little did these thoughtless men imagine that they were fulfilling ancient

prophecy to the very letter, and calling forth virtues more than human. "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth : He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth." (Isai. liii. 7.) "When He was reviled," He "reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." (1 Peter ii. 23.) "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do." (Luke xxiii. 34.) Wonderful is the providence of God, which so overruled wickedness the most atrocious and daring, as to render it a means of exhibiting the character of Christ in the perfection of its purity, for the imitation of His people to the end of time.

Yet the overruling providence of God is still more manifest in the death of Christ, upon which the salvation of a guilty world was made to depend. That the Son of God should assume the human nature, and die as a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of all mankind, was the eternal purpose of God in the prospect of their fall and ruin. Death everlasting is the penalty of sin ; and from that terrible penalty we "were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold ; but with the precious blood of Christ :" "who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times" for this great and all-important purpose. (1 Peter i. 18-20.) His death was therefore prefigured, as a matter of absolute certainty, by the ten thousand animal sacrifices which smoked upon the altars of God in the patriarchal times, and under the Levitical economy, till "the fulness of the time

was come," when He "appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." On this subject the prophetic testimony was also full and explicit; (Isai. liii. and Dan. ix. 24-27;) and our blessed Lord Himself often spoke of His approaching death as matter of absolute certainty, and as necessary in order to the salvation of men.

It is natural then to inquire whether the authorities of the Jewish nation were under any fatal necessity to cherish toward Him the intense and deadly hatred by which they were actuated when they clamoured for His blood? and whether Pontius Pilate was under any such necessity, when, against the convictions of his own mind, he condemned an innocent man to be crucified? The answer is, Not at all. It was the duty of all these parties to believe in Jesus as the Son and the Christ of God, and to love Him in that character. They might have thus believed in Him, and loved Him; and it was their shame and sin that they did not.

With respect to the Jews, the crucifixion of Christ was at once their sin, and the punishment of sin previously committed. Their hardness of heart surpassed that of Pharaoh, and has no parallel in the records of human guilt. Their own Scriptures taught them to expect an extraordinary Messenger at this period of their national existence; and the signs of the times were distinct and manifest. The visit of the wise men of the East, under the guidance of a miraculous star; the appearance of the angels to the shepherds in the night of our Saviour's birth; the prophecies of Simeon and Anna when He was presented in the temple; the wonderful ministry of John the Baptist, by which the

entire population of the Holy Land was moved; the spotless character of Jesus, His wise and holy teaching, and His miracles of power and mercy; all attested that the time of the Messiah had come, and that Jesus of Nazareth was He. Addressing these perverse men, He said, "When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and louring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?" (Matt. xvi. 2, 3.) Speaking of them, He also said, "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father." (John xv. 24.) They saw the Father in the works of Christ; for His miracles were such as could only be wrought by the power of God. In hating Christ, therefore, they hated the Father, who had sent Him, and who authenticated His mission and His claims. For their incorrigible unbelief and hostility to the truth, under the flood of light which God in mercy at that time poured upon them, they were given up to a judicial blindness of mind and hardness of heart, so that the clearest evidence failed to convince them. They remained unaffected under the most awful warnings; and even the most merciful Redeemer, who came expressly "to seek and to save that which was lost," uttered against them the awful denunciation,—"Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matt. xxiii. 32, 33.)

As they were bent upon His death, regardless of the

consequences, our Saviour voluntarily yielded Himself to them, an unresisting victim ; saying, however, to His disciples, “Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father.” (John x. 17, 18.) For reasons unknown to us, it pleased God that His Son should be delivered up into the hands of sinful men, who thirsted for His blood, and that Christ should *thus* make the necessary atonement for the sin of the world. Our Saviour therefore offered no resistance to the armed men who came to apprehend Him in the garden of Gethsemane, nor to those who led Him to Calvary, and nailed Him to the cross. Addressing the sinners who had done this deed, St. Peter said, “Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” (Acts ii. 23.) The Father “spared Him not,” but “delivered Him up for us all ;” (Rom. viii. 32;) and the Son was “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross ;” (Phil. ii. 8;) but the men who crucified Him were free agents, and so far as they were concerned His death was a “murder.” (Acts vii. 52.)

Here then we have another wonderful display of the overruling providence of God. The heads of the Jewish nation aimed at nothing in the crucifixion of our Lord, but the gratification of their own malice. Pontius Pilate, who possessed the supreme authority, was convinced of the innocence of Jesus, and knew that “for envy” the chief priests and elders desired His death;

yet he yielded to their will that he might get rid of their importunity. And God rendered the malice of the one party, and the miserable time-serving policy of the other, subservient to His own purposes of mercy to a guilty world.

In what manner Christ would have died for the redemption of mankind, had the men who conspired to crucify Him acted an opposite part, as they ought to have acted, we know not. What He has done, we know from the testimony of His own word. What He would have done in the case supposed, is a mystery with which we have no concern. Conjectures have been formed concerning it; but it is one of the “secret things” which “belong unto the Lord our God,” and not to us. It is sufficient for us to know that the world is redeemed, and that provision is thus made for the salvation of every fallen soul of man.

The same overruling providence, which we observe in our Saviour’s death, is no less manifest in His burial, when He had given up the ghost. “The chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night, and steal Him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.” (Matt. xxvii. 62–66.) Here we find the wise taken in their own craftiness. The means which these men used

were professedly intended to prevent the clandestine removal of our Lord's body, and a false report of His resurrection ; but they, in fact, rendered the evidence of His resurrection more complete than it otherwise would have been. The military guard, placed at the sepulchre by our Lord's adversaries, become the first witnesses of His resurrection, and state some circumstances connected with it which they only had seen. Their testimony, at least, is above suspicion ; the bribe which they received, to induce them to give a false report, becomes generally known ; and thus the evidence of His resurrection is strengthened by the very means which were used to throw discredit upon it. But for the "guard," many would perhaps never have heard of the removal of the stone by the hand of an angel ; nor of the glorious appearance of that heavenly messenger, overpowering "the keepers," so that they "did shake, and became as dead men." (Matt. xxviii. 4.)

After our Saviour had finished His work upon earth, and ascended to heaven, we find the same providence guarding His church, restraining its adversaries, and rendering even persecution a means of its extension and triumph. Stephen was barbarously murdered ; but the record of his happy death has animated many a martyr, encouraged many a timid believer in the prospect of his final conflict, and will never fail to instruct and encourage the people of God till everyone of them is gathered into his heavenly home. "And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." (Acts vii.

59, 60.) Who can contemplate this scene, without receiving a deep impression of the truth and value of Christ's religion, thus exemplified in its first martyr ? What a noble example is here exhibited of the Christian temper ! and how cheering are the prospects which open to those who die in the Lord, and whose departing spirits Christ is waiting to receive !

The record of Stephen's happy death is not the only benefit that was then, by the good providence of God, made to arise from Jewish unbelief and hostility to the truth. "At that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem ; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." (Acts viii. 1.) "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them : and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord." (Acts xi. 19-21.)

Under the powerful ministry of the apostles, Christianity spread with great rapidity in Jerusalem, so that many thousands of people assumed the Christian profession. The heads of the nation, who had been concerned in the crucifixion of Christ, never relented in their hostility to Him and His truth. They resolved, if possible, to extinguish His rising cause by means of persecution ; which, however, produced a contrary effect. It led to a dispersion of many Christians through the

country parts of the Holy Land, while others went to Samaria, to Syria, to Egypt, and to the islands of the Mediterranean sea : and wherever they went, they carried with them the light of the Gospel. Men who chose exile, rather than an abandonment of their Christian profession, could not be silent on a subject to which they had so profound an attachment. Wherever they went, therefore, they declared "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God ;" so that, in consequence of their dispersion, many thousands of people—men, women, and children, Jews and heathens—heard of Christ and His salvation, who would otherwise, in all probability, have lived and died in ignorance of both. In this manner did God effectually advance the cause of Christ by the very means which bad men had employed to effect its subversion !

Not only are the sins of wicked men sometimes overruled for good, but the mistakes and inadvertencies of good men are not unfrequently made subservient to beneficial purposes. St. Paul and Barnabas were sent forth from Antioch to preach the Gospel and plant churches through an extensive district of country, and had cause to rejoice in their success. When they had fulfilled this commission, they agreed to visit the churches they had planted ; and Barnabas proposed that Mark, who was his nephew, should accompany them. To this Paul objected, because Mark had left them on a former occasion, when they accepted him as a fellow-labourer. Here was a difference of judgment, and neither party was willing to yield. After debating the matter with eagerness, "they departed asunder one from the other : and so Barnabas took Mark" as his companion, "and

sailed unto Cyprus ; and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God." (Acts xv. 36-41.) That there was any malignant feeling in this case, we know not. Some writers have thought there was ; but it is very possible that they were mistaken. These holy men and faithful servants of Christ differed in opinion ; they attached great importance to their own views, and defended them with warmth and pertinacity ; and, as they could not agree on the propriety of taking Mark with them, they parted, each of them choosing his own associate. Whether this separation was in itself innocent or not, it was so overruled by the providence of God as to be a public benefit. Paul and Barnabas were both qualified to conduct an evangelical mission ; and they went forth in different directions, each accompanied by his chosen helper, to preach the Gospel to Jew and Greek. The light of truth was thus more widely diffused than it would have been, had the "paroxysm" between them never been excited. It is also right to observe that St. Paul's doubts concerning the nephew of Barnabas were afterwards removed. Within a short period of his martyrdom, he said to Timothy, whom he invited to visit him in prison, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee ; for he is profitable to me for the ministry ;" (2 Tim. iv. 11;) thus showing that he no longer entertained any doubts as to Mark's fidelity.

The kind and gracious providence which attended the Christian exiles was no less mindful of the apostles and of their assistants, labouring in the cause of Christ, and encountering every form of opposition and discouragement. At Philippi St. Paul and his chosen companion

Silas witnessed a singular display of human violence, and of Divine power and goodness. In that heathen city “the multitude rose up together against them : and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely : who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.” (Acts xvi. 22–24.)

To a man who looks only at second causes, the case of these friendless strangers would appear desperate ; and it could hardly be expected that they would escape with their lives. But they were the servants of God, employed in His work ; and He not only brought about their deliverance, but made the violence with which they had been treated a means of advancing the cause which it was the business of their lives to extend. The persecution of these men of God was followed by a miraculous earthquake ; and this interposition of Divine power led to the conversion of the jailer and his family. Then followed the humiliation of the magistrates, who found that they had violated the Roman law, and were glad to make their peace with the men whom they had maltreated and imprisoned. A feeling in favour of the Gospel was thus produced in many minds ; and the consequence was the organization in Philippi of one of the most pure and spiritual of all the apostolic churches. Its members were remarkable for their affectionate attachment to St. Paul, whose necessities they liberally relieved at various times, and especially when he was a prisoner in Rome. (Phil. iv. 16–18.) When he sent an epistle to them, some ten or eleven years after he

had formed them into a church, he was not aware of anything among them that called for reproof, and therefore addressed them exclusively in language of congratulation, instruction, and encouragement. In the case of the Philippian magistrates we have a fine illustration of the Psalmist's declaration : " Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee : the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain." (Psalm lxxvi. 10.) These rash men, having offended against the majesty of the Roman law, "came" to Paul and Silas of their own accord, meek and submissive, "besought them" to forgive the outrage, "brought them out" of the house of the jailer, "and desired them to depart out of the city ;" evidently afraid lest they should be made answerable for what they had done. Well might the apostle exclaim, "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place." (2 Cor. ii. 14.)

When St. Paul had spent several years in the exercise of his ministry among the Gentiles, he visited Jerusalem at the time of the Pentecost, hoping to be refreshed by intercourse with the members of the mother church, and to be of use to His unbelieving countrymen, who might be expected to attend that great festival. On his arrival he found that the spirit which had crucified the Lord Jesus, and had slain the martyr Stephen,—the spirit by which he had himself been formerly actuated,—was still rampant in that doomed city : for, as soon as he was recognised there, forty men bound themselves by an oath, that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed him. (Acts xxiii. 21.)

The benefits which by the overruling providence of God resulted from the murderous conspiracy of these forty madmen it will require eternity fully to disclose. For the preservation of the apostle's life, he was sent a prisoner to Cæsarea, where he was brought into intercourse with Felix and Festus, the representatives of the Roman government, and with king Agrippa,—to all of whom he declared the nature and design of the Gospel, in which they had as deep an interest as the meanest slave. Then followed his eventful voyage along the Mediterranean sea, in company with "two hundred three score and sixteen" persons, most probably belonging to various countries; who not only heard the truth from his lips, but also saw in his character and conduct the nature and blessedness of the Christian religion; and who were all by his instrumentality preserved from a watery grave. Then he was a means of introducing the Gospel into the island of Melita, under the most favourable circumstances, and evidently with success; for at his departure the people manifested a lively feeling of thankfulness and obligation.

His next removal was to Rome; and though he was still a prisoner, "the word of God," with which he was entrusted, "was not bound." He was chained to a soldier; but he lived "in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him." Here he remained "two whole years," "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him." With a company of Jews before him, we find him engaged in his ministry "from morning till evening:"

and it is probable that many a day he spent in this manner, free from all interruption either by the civil authorities or the populace. (Acts xxviii. 23, 30, 31.) Of his success in preaching, and of the happy state of his mind, he has given an encouraging account in his Epistle to the Philippians, which he wrote at this time. He says, "I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace," or "in Cæsar's court," as the marginal rendering is, "and in all other places; and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Phil. i. 12-14, 21.) Thus did it please God, not only to defeat the wicked project of the forty madmen in Jerusalem, but also to render their conspiracy a means of advancing His own work and glory, by giving the apostle access to men of rank, whom in all probability he would otherwise never have seen; by sending the Gospel into places where the name of Christ had never been heard; and by giving His servant an opportunity for exhibiting before the church and the world an example of patience in suffering, and of ministerial fidelity. "O that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" (Psalm cvii. 8.)

It is not in respect of the open and avowed adversaries of the Gospel only, that we recognise the gracious interposition of Divine Providence, but also in cases of irregularity and error in the Christian church. Great

as these evils are, they are often overruled for good. While the apostles were yet alive, various forms of false doctrine and of unchristian conduct appeared among their converts, which called for authoritative interference; and from the corrections and admonitions which inspired men administered, mankind will draw benefit till the end of time. In the church at Corinth, for example, a spirit of faction was extensively prevalent, with an abuse of the Lord's supper and of spiritual gifts; some of its members denied the resurrection of the dead, and mixed the pure doctrines of Christianity with the uncertain speculations of heathen philosophy; and the entire church tolerated the sin of incest in one of its members. It was mainly for the correction of these evils, and the establishment of truth and holiness in opposition to them, that St. Paul addressed to that church the two Epistles which bear its name, which constitute a very important part of holy Scripture, and which will never cease to instruct and edify the people of God. The apostle was deeply grieved with the sins and errors of his spiritual children, which he was called to reprove and expose, so that he wrote with "many tears;" (2 Cor. ii. 4;) but the truth which on this occasion he was led to assert in his Lord's name has gladdened many a Christian heart, and will gladden many more in the future ages of the world.

Before St. John, the last surviving apostle, went to his heavenly rest, various classes of men, known by the general name of Gnostics, made their appearance, and greatly troubled the Christian church by their profane and mischievous speculations on the most important truths of Christianity; especially on the person of Christ,

and the Almighty Creator. They denied our Saviour's proper Divinity, and the reality of His human nature. They spoke of Him as one among many Divine emanations, and not as "the only begotten of the Father;" and that which was regarded as His body, they declared to have been a phantom, by which the senses of mankind were deceived, so that He was a man only in appearance. At the same time they held the notion of two gods, one good, and the other evil. To the evil god they ascribed the creation of the world, and spoke of the mission of Christ as intended to correct the misdoings of the Creator. While these wild ravings appeared to have some affinity to Christianity, they were obviously subversive of its essential principles, and of its gracious design. We are not therefore surprised to find that the Gnostic heresies produced fearful uneasiness among the sincere followers of our Lord.

To these pernicious speculations St. John especially is understood to have supplied an antidote, particularly in his first Epistle, and in the introduction of his Gospel. In these inspired compositions he asserts, in a manner the most explicit, the proper Godhead of our Saviour, the reality of His human nature, and the union of both in His Person as the Christ of God. He declares that all things, without exception, were made, not by an evil being, but by the Father and the Son; and that the Son was manifested, not to "destroy" the works of the Creator, but "the works of the devil." (John i. 1-14; 1 John iii. 8.) The dreams of the Gnostics have long since passed away from the minds of men, and are nowhere to be found but in the pages of history; but inspired truth, which those dreams called forth, remains

in perpetuity, as the rule of faith and the instrument of salvation. It would appear, then, that some of the most explicit declarations of Holy Scripture, as to the true character of Christ, and the design of His incarnation, were called forth in consequence of the profane speculations of men of corrupt minds. The evil was human or diabolical in its origin, and transitory in its duration. The good, of which God in His adorable providence made it the occasion, is great and endless.

One of the practical conclusions to which we are led by the facts now adduced is thus expressed by the Psalmist : “ Fret not thyself because of evil doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.” (Psalm xxxvii. 1, 2.) “ God esteems it one of His glories that He brings good out of evil ; and therefore it is but reason we should trust God to govern the world as He pleases ; and that we should patiently wait till the change cometh, or the reason be discovered.” \*

\* Jeremy Taylor.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD A MORAL DISCIPLINE.

THE dispensations of Divine Providence towards mankind are so arranged as to serve as tests of character. No man is at liberty to affect independence, but each is bound to live in entire and habitual subjection to the Creator's will. This was required of Adam from the first moment of his being; and "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," which grew "in the midst of the garden" of Eden, was the test of his obedience. He was required so to repress every feeling of vain curiosity, and every dictate of his appetite, as to abstain from the fruit of that tree, however inviting it might be to the taste, and however "desirable to make one wise;" because such was the Creator's will. Persuaded by his wife, who had been beguiled by the serpent, he was disobedient to the Divine command; and thus

"Brought death into our world, with all our woe."

Since the fall mankind have been dealt with by God, not upon the principles of strict and rigorous law, but under a constitution of grace and mercy, which contains a provision for the full and free forgiveness of all sin. Yet still an absolute submission to the will of God is required in every human being; that submission is subjected to a great variety of tests;

and individual men obtain favour with God, or are rejected by Him, according to the manner in which they pass through the ordeal. "Submit yourselves therefore to God," (James iv. 7,) is an admonition, compliance with which is no less a privilege than a duty. This is a subject which is confirmed and illustrated in almost every page of the Bible; but we have only space for the consideration of a few examples.

When Abraham was seventy-five years old, he was directed to leave the land of his birth, and take up his residence in a distant country, with which he was altogether unacquainted. There were reasons for this requirement, which he did not at this time perceive. Notwithstanding the mysteriousness of the command, and the painful sacrifice it involved, he "went out, not knowing whither he went," yielding an implicit submission to the authority of God. (Gen. xii. 1, 4; Heb. xi. 8.) At a subsequent period he received the promise of a son by Sarah his wife; but the fulfilment of the promise was delayed for several years, till it could only be fulfilled by a miracle. Still the faith of the patriarch was unshaken. He fixed his attention exclusively upon the omnipotence and fidelity of God, regardless of all difficulties and of second causes, when God had pledged His veracity. (Gen. xv. 4; xxi. 2; Rom. iv. 19-21.) It was further declared to him, that the posterity of Isaac should be numerous like "the stars of heaven;" but before a child was born to Isaac, the father was directed to slay him, and offer him as a burnt sacrifice to God. Yet the faith of Abraham endured even this test, severe as it was. He believed that if Isaac were put to death, and his body reduced to

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ashes, God would raise him up again, so that the promise would not fail. Without questioning the goodness, the authority, or the faithfulness of God, he therefore "took the knife to slay his son," as he lay bound upon the altar; and, having thus passed through the fiery trial, he was relieved from the painful duty imposed upon him, and in return received special tokens of God's approval. He "gave glory to God" by an absolute reliance upon God's truth and power; and thus became the father of the faithful, the great example of believers to the end of the world.

The character of Job was subjected to tests quite as severe as those by which the character of Abraham was tried. He was a man of vast wealth, of deep piety, of great generosity, held in honour by all his contemporaries, and eminently blessed with respect to the children that God had given him. God Himself not only acknowledged Job to be His "servant," but declared that there was "none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man." (Job i. 8.) In respect of property he "was the greatest of all the men of the East;" and "there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters." His sheep, and his servants that had the care of them, were destroyed by lightning; his camels were stolen by Chaldeans, and the men that had the charge of them were murdered by these daring thieves; then his sons and daughters were all slain by the falling of the house of their eldest brother, where they were assembled on a festive occasion. Under all these calamities the holy man "rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, Naked came I out of my mother's

womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." (Job i. 20-22.)

Sad and overwhelming as were these calamities, further trials of his faith and patience were yet in reserve. "The Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life. So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes." (Job ii. 6-8.) Yet even under this severe visitation, and the evil counsel of his wife, who failed in this emergency of his affairs to be "a helpmeet for him," the patient sufferer uttered the memorable words, "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" "In all this did not Job sin with his lips." The "good" which men receive from God is perfectly gratuitous. The "evil" that they receive is the just consequence of sin, and at present is far less than they deserve to suffer. The "good" therefore calls for thankfulness, and the "evil" for penitence and submission. Such was the feeling and the acknowledgment of Job in his deep depression.

But even yet his sufferings were not ended. His "friends," instead of supporting him by a kind sympathy, rashly concluded that the calamities which had come upon him were judgments from God, inflicted on account of some secret sin to which he had been addicted: and this assumption they maintained with pertinacity and bitter words. In the eager debate that

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ensued, Job proved that, with all his excellencies, he was a man compassed with infirmity both of judgment and temper. He repelled the unjust charges that were preferred against him ; he expressed an entire confidence in God, whose dealings with him he confessed his inability to comprehend ; but his spirits seemed alternately to rise and fall. His mind was bewildered and perplexed, and he advanced sentiments of which he afterwards repented. It was a great aggravation of his sufferings, that he had no human friend to whom he could look for sympathy and counsel. Neither he, nor any person with whom he was connected, appeared to understand his case, or to know why he was thus afflicted. He came out of his trials, however, a wiser and a better man ; deeply impressed with the greatness and majesty of God, and his own littleness in the presence of his Maker and Judge ; and thus effectually subdued in his spirit. In this state of mind and heart he received the most cheering tokens of the Divine favour, being appointed to intercede for his accusers ; for it was only in answer to his prayers that God would forgive the hard speeches they had uttered against His "servant Job." Thus was realized the sure confidence of the afflicted man, expressed in the lowest depths of his sorrow : "He knoweth the way that I take : when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." (Job xxiii. 10.)

The character of the man of Uz was tried by the two extremes of prosperity and adversity, and in both cases he endured with advantage the searching test. In the time of wealth, honour, and domestic happiness, he was charitable, devout, circumspect, and humble ; and

in the time of poverty, bereavement, sickness, pain, and reproach, like gold in the fire, he lost nothing but dross, and emerged from his troubles invested with a higher character than he had heretofore sustained. Under the cruel treatment of his friends, he spoke unadvisedly with his lips ; and in this respect he fell short of “the meekness and gentleness of Christ,” who, “when He was reviled, reviled not again.” But Job’s incontinence of speech his Maker reprobated and pardoned ; and mankind in every age are required to imitate the excellencies of this patient man.

The providential treatment of the Hebrew tribes on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land was one continued course of moral discipline. Moses therefore said to them, when their wanderings were brought to a close, “Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no.” (Deut. viii. 2.) The declared purpose of their emancipation was their immediate entrance into the land promised to their fathers ; and the plagues inflicted upon their oppressors, the wealth which they were allowed to carry away with them, and the miraculous passage of the Red Sea, all demonstrated the ability and willingness of God to fulfil His promises of future good. But no sooner were these wayward people placed in circumstances of difficulty, than their confidence in God entirely failed ; they forgot what He had already done for them, and in their hearts turned back to their former state of miserable bondage. Their inexcusable unbelief, ingratitude, and

frequent murmurings so provoked the Almighty, that He left the entire generation of men who came out of Egypt, with two exceptions, to die in the wilderness; in His wrath refusing them an entrance into His promised rest. When subjected to the various tests of Divine providence, the evil character of the people immediately appeared; and their sad case is proposed in Scripture as a warning to others. "All these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition." (1 Cor. x. 11.) They teach that the richest blessings and advantages may be forfeited by sin, especially by the sin of unbelief.

A few references to the facts of their history will place their character in an impressive light. When Moses and Aaron gathered the elders of Israel together, and informed them that God intended to bring them forthwith to the possession of the land of Canaan, presenting at the same time their miraculous credentials; these men "believed" the joyful tidings, "bowed their heads, and worshipped." (Exod. iv. 31.) But when their burdens were increased because of the demand which was made for their immediate departure, their faith failed; they could not bear up under the temporary inconvenience; and they even appealed to God against the interference of Moses and Aaron in their case. (Exod. v. 21.)

It is observable, that in His subsequent dealings with them He was always ready to deliver them in times of danger, and to supply their necessities; but before He interposed, He gave them to see their danger, and to feel their wants, that He might try their faith. When Egypt was all but ruined by the ten plagues, permission was given for the Israelites to depart; they were led to

the borders of the Red Sea, and there brought to a stand. The water was before them, and an armed host behind. In this emergency they forgot what had been already done for them. They "cried out unto the Lord" in terror and despair, expecting no answer; for they murmured against Moses, believed that they should be immediately slain, and expressed a strong regret that they had been persuaded to cast off the yoke of their oppressors. The sea was divided before them; they passed safely through the channel provided for them; and when they had arrived at the opposite shore, and the waters had closed upon their enemies, they joined in a hymn of praise, which they had never done before; but *then* they thought their perils were at an end.

On their entrance into the wilderness, they felt the pinchings of hunger. And now forgetting that they were travelling under the guidance and care of Almighty God; and that He who had "given Egypt as a ransom" for them, and divided the sea for their benefit, was equally ready to provide for them at all times; "the whole congregation" murmured against Moses and Aaron, thinking that they should die for want of bread. They received a miraculous supply of food; but even this additional display of the goodness of God failed to excite in them either thankfulness or faith; for at their next movement, on finding a scarcity of water, they repeated their murmurs, and expressed an apprehension that they should die for thirst. A miraculous supply of water was granted; and, to shame the people, two names were given to the place, as a perpetual memorial of their ingratitude and unbelief. It was called "Massah" and "Meribah;" words which denote

"temptation," and "chiding;" "because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us, or not?" (Exod. xvii. 7.) Yet even this memorial of their sin produced in them no permanent change of character; for when they removed into another neighbourhood, where the supply of water was deficient, their murmurings were as loud as ever. (Num. xx. 3.)

During their stay in the wilderness spies were sent into the promised land, to survey the country, and make a report concerning it. On their return, they declared that the soil was rich, and its productions luxuriant: but they deemed the conquest impossible; for some of the inhabitants were of gigantic stature, and the fortifications of the city lofty and strong. Two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, were indeed men of "another spirit," men of faith and enterprise, who said, "Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it;"—meaning, of course, that they were "able" in the strength of God. But the people generally received the discouraging report of the majority of the spies; they therefore "wept that night," and, if possible, murmured more loudly than ever. They ought to have remembered that the giants and fortifications of Canaan, strictly speaking, were no concern of theirs. What are giants and walled cities to Him that made the heavens and the earth? God had promised to put them in possession of the land, and it was their duty to believe His word. By their unbelief on this occasion, they filled up the measure of their iniquities. He who had done such great things for them said, "Because all those men which have seen My glory, and My miracles,

which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted Me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to My voice ; surely they shall not see the land which I sware unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked Me see it." (Num. xiv. 22, 23.) Their "carcasses fell in the wilderness," and their sin and punishment are recorded as a warning to unbelievers in all ages till the end of time. Christians, travelling through the wilderness of this world, on their way to the heavenly Canaan, are warned, by the faithlessness and doom of the Hebrew tribes, of the possibility and danger of falling short of that better land ; and of the consequent necessity of perseverance in faith, in holy love, and in evangelical obedience. "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." (Heb. iv. 1.)

The eventful life of David presents many examples of providential interposition, which tried his moral principles, and exhibited their strength. His extraordinary popularity rendered him an object of jealousy to Saul, who therefore resolved, if possible, to take his life ; and for this murderous purpose "hunted" him "like a partridge in the mountains" of Israel. Twice had this injured man an opportunity for taking his revenge upon his persecutor ; but he resisted every suggestion to that effect, and repressed every hostile feeling that would have risen in his own mind. The first of these opportunities occurred when Saul retired alone into a cave, not knowing that David and his men were there ; and afterwards, when David went during the night, and took away Saul's spear, while Saul and his attendants were

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asleep. In both these cases David's friends requested permission to slay the gloomy and envious king, who was bent upon a deed of cruelty and blood; but David was deaf to all their entreaties, breathing a spirit of charity and forgiveness towards the man who sought his life, and committing his cause to God "who judgeth righteously." (1 Sam. xxiv. 6; xxvi. 9-12.)

On another occasion the providence of God subjected David to a test still more severe. Finding no place of safety in his own land, accompanied by six hundred men who attached themselves to him, he fled to Achish, a Philistine king, who gave him and his attendants Ziklag as their place of residence. Achish, in the meanwhile, was engaged in a war with Saul; and David and his men went to offer their services to the king who treated them with such marked generosity. Achish had confidence in their fidelity, but his princes thought they were not to be trusted in a war against their own countrymen; so David and his men returned to their home, which they found in ruins. The town of Ziklag was burnt, their property all taken away, and their wives and children made captives, by a formidable company of Amalekites, who had committed similar depredations in several other places. "Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep. And David's two wives were taken captives, Ahinoam the Jezreelite, and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite. And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters."

We can scarcely conceive of a condition more calamitous than that of David at this crisis. He was in a heathen country, distant from his home and his friends; for any thing that he knew to the contrary, his children might be slain, and his wives subjected to a humiliation more bitter than death itself; he had no habitation, no property, no friends, no food; the very men who had cast in their lot with him now became his enemies, and "spake of stoning him." There can be no doubt that they meant what they "spake;" for they were men of desperate fortunes and of desperate character. (1 Sam. xxii. 2.)

In these circumstances "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." No human help was available, but God was near. We may reasonably suppose that he thought of what God is in Himself; how mighty, how wise, how merciful, and good; and that he called to his remembrance the fact, that the Lord was *his* God. He bore in his own person the sacrament of God's covenant of mercy; he thought of what God had done for him on former occasions, delivering him "from the lion and the bear," and from Goliath of Gath; and he regarded past manifestations of God's goodness and power as pledges of present help and deliverance. In this manner, we may reasonably suppose, he "encouraged himself in the Lord his God." Then, after consulting the oracle of God, he went in pursuit of the robbers, whom he and his men found rioting in plenty; and, after inflicting upon the greater part of them the punishment they so richly deserved, David and his men not only recovered all that they had lost, but acquired a vast amount of property besides. The men who had

just before "wept" on account of their losses, till they had "no more power to weep," now found themselves in possession of vast wealth, a part of which, under the direction of David, they restored to the parties who had been plundered; and at the same time they sent large presents "to all the places where David and his men were wont to haunt." David's faith was put to a severe test when he had lost at one time his wives, his children, and the whole of his property, and his friends proposed to murder him outright; and his generosity was put to the test when a large amount of wealth was suddenly placed at his disposal; and in both cases his character appears to the greatest advantage. In the time of trouble he put his trust in God; and in his prosperity he relieved those who had befriended him; being neither unduly depressed in the time of adversity, nor selfish and ungrateful in the time of prosperity.

Hezekiah was in the main a good man and a good king. He suppressed idolatry, and promoted the worship of God among his people, but was not faultless. On one occasion, in particular, he proved faithless under a providential test of character. He accumulated wealth to a vast extent; so that he "had exceeding much riches and honour: and he made himself treasures for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels; store-houses also for the increase of corn, and wine, and oil; and stalls for all manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks. Moreover he provided him cities, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance: for God had given him substance very much." (2 Chron. xxxii. 27-29.) After his recovery from what was regarded

as a mortal disease, in answer to prayer, and the miracle by which his recovery was attended, "Merodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah;" making inquiries into the facts of the case, and offering congratulations. (Isai. xxxix. 1.) Instead of being deeply humbled before God on account of his restored health, "his heart was lifted up" in "pride;" he felt himself flattered by the deputation from the court of Babylon, and exhibited the whole of his property to the men who visited him. "There was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not." (Isai. xxxix. 2.) With respect to these "ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that He might know all that was in his heart." (2 Chron. xxxii. 31.)

The foolish vanity which Hezekiah displayed when God ceased to control him cost the nation dear, and brought upon him a terrible rebuke. "Then said Isaiah to Hezekiah, Hear the word of the Lord of Hosts: Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." (Isai. xxxix. 5-7.) After this ostentatious display of wealth in the Holy Land, it was twice invaded by the kings of Babylon, evidently for the sake of plunder. The riches which were there accumulated were seized by these grasping monarchs, the

vanity and indiscretion of Hezekiah having excited their cupidity.

Hezekiah's descendants, Daniel and his three noble friends, passed through severer tests than he had ever done; yet they proved faithful in the time of trial. When exposed to the blandishments of a heathen court, and to the splendid ceremonial of heathen worship, they maintained their integrity; and still more, when they were willing to pay the forfeit of their lives rather than sin against God. The faith of the noble confessors was unshaken, when they saw the flames of the heated furnace; and that of Daniel, when he heard the lions roaring for their prey. Theirs was a constancy that nothing could shake. (Dan. i. 5-8; iii. 21; vi. 16.) To them both worldly honours and a martyr's death were matters of comparative indifference. Their great concern was to please God, and to stand accepted before Him. For what is life, with all its honour and advantages, when compared with a good conscience and the hope of heaven?

Many able writers have thought that our Lord's account of the rich man and Lazarus is not to be regarded as a parable, but as a narrative of facts. On the supposition that this opinion is correct, when Lazarus was "laid at the gate" of the rich man, the character of these two persons, whose circumstances were so widely different, was subjected to a searching test. It was seen by Him who reads every heart, whether the beggar, when brought within sight of the princely mansion, of the rich clothing of the owner, and of the daily festivity that was carried on there, could bear without a murmur, in meek submission to his Maker's will, nakedness,

hunger, and disease; and it was seen whether the rich man, at the sight of want and misery, would in tender sympathy attempt to alleviate the sufferings of this afflicted son of want, or treat him with neglect; whether he would cherish a spirit of thankfulness for the health and plenty he enjoyed, or live in criminal forgetfulness of God, who dealt "bountifully with" him. (Luke xvi. 19-21.) He who reads every heart, and who placed these men in circumstances so opposite to each other, dealt with them according to their spirit and temper.

The appearance of the "man" that "went from Jerusalem to Jericho," and "fell among thieves, which stripped him" of his clothing, "wounded him, and left him half dead," was a test of character to three men. The priest and Levite who "saw him," and went "by on the other side," manifested an unfeeling selfishness. The Samaritan, who dressed the wounds of the sufferer, put him on his own beast, brought him to an inn, and provided for all his necessities there, did everything that humanity could suggest, and proved himself to be at once merciful and generous. (Luke x. 30-37.) These statements indeed occur in a parable, but they have their counterpart in the events of daily life. Some men, at the sight of poverty and disease, will scarcely give themselves the trouble to say to the children of pain and sorrow, "Be ye warmed, fed, and healed;" while others are always ready to shed a tear of pity, and to stretch out a helping hand. The spirit and conduct of both classes are under the constant inspection of the omniscient Judge, who will render unto every one according to his deeds. Every act of man, whether good or evil, is recorded in heaven, and will be brought

to light in the day of judgment, and then dealt with as matter of gracious reward, or of righteous punishment. (Matt. xxv. 34-46.)

Strange as it may appear, the manifestation of the Son of God in the human nature, and the office He sustains as the Mediator between God and men,—which present the richest display of the Divine grace and mercy,—are the most momentous tests to which the characters of mankind are subjected. When “the child Jesus” was brought into the temple, the venerable Simeon was there under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and, taking into his arms the infant Saviour, he rose into a prophetic rapture, “blessed” Joseph and Mary, and then, addressing the mother of our Lord, said, “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” (Luke ii. 34, 35.)

The design of our Saviour’s appearance in the flesh, and of His sacrificial death upon the cross, is to raise mankind from their fallen state of guilt, of helplessness, and of misery, and to bring them into a state of reconciliation with God,—a state of peace and holiness,—as preparatory to their admission into the blissful presence of God in heaven; but only on the conditions specified in the Gospel, and especially that of a personal faith in Him. Accordingly, all true believers, whatever may have been their former character, are introduced through His mediation into the favour and family of God, so as to become heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; they are sanctified to God in body, soul, and spirit, by the

power of the Holy Ghost ; and will be finally raised to mansions and thrones in the heavenly world. On the other hand, those who refuse to believe in Him, or neglect to believe in Him, sink into deeper guilt and misery by those very means which were intended to secure their everlasting welfare ; for they add to their natural depravity, and to their other acts of personal transgression, that most fearful of all crimes, the crime of rejecting Christ as their Saviour, the gift of God's infinite and eternal love. There is only one Saviour, and that is Christ the Lord ; there is only one salvation, and that is the salvation of which He is the Author ; and to reject both is to remain for ever under the guilt and curse of sin, both original and actual.

In the days of our Lord there was a numerous class of people among the Jews who enjoyed a high reputation as persons of extraordinary piety. They courted observation in the performance of religious worship, "standing to pray" in the synagogues and in the temple, and even "in the corners of the streets ;" (Matt. vi. 5;) they affected great scrupulosity and tenderness of conscience in the observance of Divine precepts, paying "tithe of mint and anise and cummin ;" (Matt. xxiii. 23;) and they put forth strenuous efforts to induce heathen people to embrace the Jews' religion, "compassing sea and land to make" even "one proselyte." (Matt. xxiii. 15.) Among these men there were doubtless some who were sincere in their profession ; but the generality of them were vile hypocrites, carrying on the foulest practices under a mask of religion, robbing even widows, "and for a pretence making, long prayers." (Mark xii. 40.) The real character of

these bad men our Saviour effectually exposed ; declaring that their religion was all external, and that it was used as a cloak to conceal the secret wickedness to which they were addicted. His doctrine, requiring purity of heart, and the utmost simplicity of motive, filled the Pharisees with resentment, and thus “revealed the thoughts of many hearts.”

The true character of these men was yet more fully disclosed when the Gospel revelation was completed, and the apostles entered upon their ministry, announcing, in the name and by the authority of God, that “by the deeds of the law” no man, whether Jew or Gentile, can “be justified ;” and that justification to eternal life can only be obtained by faith in Christ crucified. This doctrine, which denies all proper merit in man, and declares that he can only be justified before God as a mere sinner, was particularly distasteful to the great body of the Jewish people, who in respect of this subject rose in proud and stubborn rebellion against God and His Christ. They would either be justified on the ground of their obedience to the law of Moses, or not at all. The consequence was, that with all their “zeal of God,” and their “willing and running,” they remained under condemnation. St. Paul regarded their condition as resembling that of Pharaoh, the hardhearted king of Egypt, who set the God of heaven at defiance. By their determined unbelief, they made themselves “vessels of wrath fitted to destruction ;” and the holy apostle, who loved them as his “kinsmen according to the flesh,” had “great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart” on their account. (Rom. ix. 2, 3.) God sent His “Son to be the Saviour of the world,” (1 John

iv. 14,) He gave Him as "the chief corner stone" of salvation ; but to these perverse men, through their obstinate and inexcusable unbelief, He became "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence." (Isai. xxviii. 16 ; Rom. ix. 33 ; 1 Peter ii. 8.) There was a reason for the profound and incessant grief which St. Paul expressed ; our Saviour having said, " Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken : but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." (Matt. xxi. 44.) Large masses of people among the Jews "trusted in themselves that they were righteous ;" (Luke xviii. 9;) but their conduct towards the incarnate Son of God revealed a depth of wickedness which finds no parallel in the history of the world ; and their punishment corresponded with their sin. Terrible was the revelation of their "thoughts," and the misery which they brought upon themselves. Their real character is seen, not in the self-commendation which they uttered in their prayers, but in the blasphemies which they poured forth against the Christ of God, in their clamours for His crucifixion, in their hatred of His Gospel, and in the deadly malice with which they persecuted its ministers and professors. While many "rise" through faith in Christ to life eternal ; others through unbelief "fall" to rise no more.

The faithful preaching of the Gospel to any people is to them a providential test of character. When St. Paul preached to the Jews at Thessalonica, several of them believed, and were saved. Others of them, like their brethren in Jerusalem, were so furious in their opposition, that the apostle was compelled to flee for his life to the neighbouring city of Berea, where he also

found a "synagogue of the Jews;" and to the people who assembled there he preached Christ and His salvation. "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few." (Acts xvii. 4, 11, 12.) The Jews at Thessalonica, full of prejudice and passion, refused to give the apostle a patient hearing, and were intent only upon the shedding of his blood. The Jews at Berea paid a serious, earnest, and respectful attention to the Gospel, read their Bibles daily in quest of further information; and the consequence was, that they "believed" to the saving of their souls. The "thoughts" of the two parties were thus "revealed," according to the prophecy of Simeon.

St. Paul, in the course of his travels, came to Athens, where philosophy, literature, and the arts were assiduously and successfully cultivated, but where God was unknown to the people generally, and idolatry in its worst forms was practised alike by the illiterate and the learned. "He saw the city wholly given to idolatry," opened his commission in the Jewish synagogue, and then argued "in the market daily" with those who were willing to lend him their attention, and especially with philosophers belonging to the Stoic and Epicurean sects; and next he delivered a discourse of considerable length upon Mars' Hill. He asserted the unity and supremacy of God; the fact that He is the Creator of heaven and earth, with all that they contain; the universality of Divine providence, and the

dependence of all things upon the great Creator; the spiritual worship that He requires; His patience in bearing with the past ignorance and idolatry of mankind; the call of God now addressed to all men, requiring them to repent of their evil deeds, and turn to Him; the appointment of a day of general judgment, when "the man Christ Jesus" will summon all nations to His tribunal, and assign them their everlasting destiny. Of this last fact the resurrection of Christ is an assurance from God.

The "men of Athens," who heard the apostle, and were thus supplied with the means of salvation, are divided by the inspired historian into three classes,— triflers, the undecided, and candid believers. "When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked;" treating the doctrine as not only incredible, but ridiculous; as if the Almighty Being, who created all worlds, and to whom mankind are indebted for "life and breath and all things," were unable to raise the dead. A second class of people thought the doctrine of the apostle worthy of attention; they were therefore willing to "hear him again of this matter:" yet, whatever might be the hindrance, they did not cordially receive the truth. Whether it was the love of sin, a fear of contempt and persecution, or a lingering attachment to their old superstitions, "the day will declare." "Howbeit," amidst the scornful indifference of some, and the hesitation and reserve of others, "certain men clave" to the apostle, "and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them." (Acts xvii. 16–34.) In this last class of persons we observe the characteristics of

a genuine conversion. They "believed" the Gospel of Christ, and therefore realized their interest in the "great salvation" which it reveals; and their hearts "clave" in strong and tender affection to the man who had been to them the self-denying instrument of so mighty a benefit. At the same time, the mockers and the undecided remained strangers to the joy of believing, the heaven of love, and increased their guilt by withholding their assent from the truth of God, and by their refusal to comply with His will.

During St. Paul's imprisonment at Cæsarea the character of Felix, the Roman governor, was subjected to the test of the Gospel. He had frequent interviews with the apostle; and on one occasion, at least, he was so impressed with the truth, and so alarmed at the prospect of the approaching judgment, as to "tremble" before the prisoner. But his religious convictions led to no saving result, because he was unwilling to renounce his sinful practices. He retained his adulterous connexion with Drusilla, which was in itself an effectual bar in the way of his salvation. He also hoped for a bribe, as the price of the apostle's liberation; and because that was not forthcoming, and because he felt a greater pleasure in gratifying the persecuting Jews than in performing an act of justice towards an innocent man, he "left Paul bound." (Acts xxiv. 25-27.) "Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?" (Prov. xvii. 16.)

About the same time the character of king Agrippa was by the providence of God subjected to the same searching test. When St. Paul pleaded his cause, and

that of Christ, before this man of royal birth, the word was attended by a Divine power, so as to extort from Agrippa, in the open court, the memorable confession, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." (Acts xxvi. 28.) Yet he was not fully "persuaded." Worldly honour, in all probability, interfered with his convictions, and with his spiritual and everlasting interests : for in those times how could a king connect himself with the "sect everywhere spoken against ?" Agrippa, unhappily, is not the only man that has bartered his salvation for worldly honour. And yet higher honour than was ever yet connected with an earthly throne awaits those who "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ."

Many Jews were resident in Rome when St. Paul was taken there as a prisoner. "And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging ; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening." (Acts xxviii. 23.) In this respect the apostle followed the example of the Lord Jesus in His intercourse with the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." (Luke xxiv. 27.) St. Paul doubtless showed how all the prophecies of the Old Testament, relating to the Messiah, had their fulfilment in Jesus Christ ; and how the types of the Old Testament have their corresponding antitype in His person, character, and work. To hear an inspired apostle expound the prophecies and types of the Hebrew Scrip-

tures, “from morning till evening,” was a high privilege; and a part of the men who were present evidently felt it to be such. But this was not the case with the whole of the apostle’s audience, though they continued their attendance till the close of the day. “Some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.” The men of seriousness and candour “believed” the Gospel, which is indeed “worthy of all acceptation.” Its design is the salvation of men, an object worthy of God, “the God of the spirits of all flesh;” and the evidence by which it is recommended is at once clear ample, and convincing. To those who feel their guilt, and are anxious as to their future welfare, the Gospel is eminently welcome. What it was that kept the other Jews in Rome from receiving the truth, we know not. It might be a love of sin, a worldly spirit, self-righteous pride, a vain conceit of their own wisdom, or an unwillingness to be “spoken against.” Whatever it was, its consequences are tremendous. For “he that believeth not shall be damned,” by the just judgment of God. (Mark xvi. 16.) To these unhappy men St. Paul said, with impressive solemnity, “Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.” (Acts xxviii. 24–27.)

Of all the people to whom God in His providence

sends the Gospel, He requires the cultivation of a meek and docile spirit, without which no man can either understand it, or share in its blessings. He who is both the Saviour and the Judge of men has peremptorily declared that "whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein;" (Mark x. 15;) and an apostle has added, "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise." (1 Cor. iii. 18.) Men may deem their own speculations preferable to the Gospel; but they do this at their peril. When the seventy disciples returned from their mission, and reported their success, it is said, "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight." (Luke x. 21.) Such then is the fixed purpose of God. The humble man, who receives the truth in the love of it, and surrenders himself to the Divine guidance, is made "wise unto salvation;" while the self-confident sceptic, pleased with his own speculations, makes light of the Gospel of the grace of God, and only awakes to a discovery of his own folly when the day of mercy is ended, and it is too late to retrace his erring steps.

It has often been assumed that of those who hear the Gospel a part are favoured with the grace of the Holy Spirit, and therefore believe and are saved; and that from the rest that grace is withheld, so that they necessarily remain in unbelief and perish. Upon these principles some men account for the penitence and

conversion of one of the thieves that were crucified with our Lord, and for the unbelief and reviling of the other. But this doctrine is not in the inspired record. That those who believe and are saved are the subjects of Divine influence is a great truth; for no one can believe unto salvation, but under the Holy Spirit's teaching and quickening power; nor is it denied that those who finally remain in unbelief are, in their several degrees given up to judicial blindness and hardness of heart. But then their blindness and hardness of heart are the punishment of their former sin, and of their resistance of the Holy Spirit's grace. St. Paul charges it upon the unbelieving Jews at Rome, that their hearts had "waxed gross." Then their hearts had not been always so, at least not in an equal degree. He charges them also with having "closed their eyes;" so that they had once been at least partially open. They had therefore been at one time under a Divine and gracious influence; but, like their countrymen whom Stephen addressed, it might have been said to them, "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye." (Acts vii. 51.)

Yet it is not at once that men are ordinarily given up by God. He is patient and longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, and therefore often bears with delaying sinners, the neglecters of His salvation. In order to the conversion of such men, there is often a manifest co-operation between the grace and providence of God. Warnings and invitations are faithfully addressed to them from the pulpit; the Holy Spirit strives with them, so that they are often deeply

impressed under the word, and are inwardly drawn to Christ as their Saviour. When these means are unavailing, and the Lord of the vineyard "comes seeking fruit, and finds none," He gives direction that the barren trees shall be cut down; but a respite is obtained by the compassionate Intercessor, who engages to dig about their roots, and to leave no means untried to render them fruitful. Impenitent and thoughtless men are in such cases visited with sickness, or some other calamity. They are for a time suspended between life and death, and are thus reminded of the nearness of eternity, the sacredness of time, and the necessity of an immediate compliance with the invitations of the Gospel, that, being pardoned and sanctified, they may die in peace, and meet their Judge with acceptance. In these cases Divine Providence has a voice, the import of which is, "Because there is wrath, beware lest He take thee away with His stroke: then a great ransom cannot deliver thee." (Job xxxvi. 18.)

Sometimes the Gospel call is enforced by domestic affliction and bereavement. The wife of a trifler with religion sickens and dies; a tenderly-beloved child is removed from the family circle, and taken to an early grave; an intimate friend is removed to the world of spirits; or property is unexpectedly lost, and poverty succeeds to wealth. "God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not." (Job xxxiii. 14.) If, after all these inward and outward calls, men will remain careless, impenitent, and unbelieving, a state of partial retribution ensues. The heart becomes more hard; the mind apprehends truth less clearly; evil habits gain strength, and are confirmed; and conversion becomes

more difficult than ever. "God is not mocked : for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Gal. vi. 7.) Yet, while life is prolonged, the door of mercy remains open, and the Lord waiteth that He may be gracious. But He will not always wait ; for "he that, being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." (Prov. xxix. 1.)

What has been said respecting the Gospel ministry as a test of character to the people among whom it is exercised, is equally true with regard to the possession of the Holy Scriptures. The whole of them are declared to have been written under the "inspiration of God;" (2 Tim. iii. 16;) they are therefore infallibly true, and "cannot be broken." (John x. 35.) They "testify" of Christ, both in His person and offices. (John v. 39.) They are able to make men "wise unto salvation," and were written for this purpose. (2 Tim. iii. 15.) They are "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.) Yet this inestimable boon accomplishes these high and holy purposes only when rightly used. To be the instrument of salvation, and of a just religious and moral training, the Scriptures must not only be read, but be read with attention and devout prayer. The truth is, the sacred volume may be read for the purpose of cavil and debate; ingenious arts may be devised to pervert its obvious meaning, to justify antichristian error and unholy practice, and it may thus be rendered a means of leading men to perdition; just as the Gospel ministry may be "a savour of death unto death." St. Peter places the Epistles of the

apostle Paul upon an equality with "the other Scriptures," both of the Old Testament and the New; and speaks of "unlearned and unstable" men,—men who are not taught of God, wavering,—double-minded, unsettled men,—who "wrest" what the Holy Spirit has dictated "to their own destruction." As it is possible to render our blessed Saviour,—the greatest gift of God's infinite and eternal love,—"a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence;" to contract such an amount of guilt by our conduct towards the Holy Spirit as God will never cancel; (Heb. vi. 4-6;) so it is possible for men to "fill up the measure of their iniquities," by a neglect of the Bible, or by an abuse of its holy contents. When men treat these inspired records with indifference, never reading them but to while away an idle hour, or to find matter for strife and debate; when, instead of reading them to learn God's heavenly will, that they may comply with it, they read only to force an unnatural meaning upon particular texts, to uphold their own private opinions, and especially to justify unholy practice, they "pervert the words of the living God" to their own ruin. When the Christian people of Thessalonica heard the Gospel from the lips of St. Paul, they "received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God;" (1 Thess. ii. 13;) and in the same spirit ought the holy Scriptures to be invariably read. When God speaks, every one is bound to receive what is spoken, not only with deep attention, but with reverence, docility, and obedient faith. To refuse His testimony is certain death. The possession of the Bible is a providential test of character. According to the use that is made of this

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gift of God, it will either prove the means of salvation, or an occasion of deeper guilt and more terrible condemnation.

At every period of life, and in all circumstances, the characters of men are subjected to providential tests. Youth and age, prosperity and adversity, honour and dishonour, health and sickness, ease and pain, safety and danger, are all so many tests, intended to show whether or not men will fear God, trust in Him, and submit to His will. The sight of the wedge of gold and of the Babylonish garment put to the test the moral principles of Achan, who failed in the hour of trial, by appropriating to himself these forbidden things. (Joshua vii. 21.) Peter's fidelity to Christ was tried, when he had ventured into the house of the high priest, and was challenged as a follower of Christ; and his boasted courage failed him, so that he fell into the sin of denying his Lord. (Matt. xxvi. 69-75.) The moral principles of Pilate were tried, when the authorities of the Jewish nation called upon him to order the crucifixion of the Son of God; and he passed sentence of death upon One in whom he confessed he "found no fault;" thus violating his conscience, and involving himself in guilt and dishonour. (Matt. xxvii. 24, 26.) The faith of Peter and John was subjected to a severe test, when they were "threatened" with martyrdom by the same authorities, and "commanded not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus;" and they nobly answered, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (Acts iv. 17-20.) The faith of the Galilean fishermen

was superior to Roman virtue. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him." (James i. 12.)

With respect to believers in Jesus Christ, the regenerated children of God, who live and walk by faith, worshipping God in spirit and in truth, and presenting themselves habitually to Him as "a holy living sacrifice," the providence of God bears a benign and gracious character. Their affairs are all in the hands of their heavenly Father, and are ordered by Him in perfect wisdom and love. Their temporal enjoyments may be often interrupted, but their spiritual interests are all secure. In their case the dispensations of Divine providence are directed to three objects, which they ought themselves to keep constantly in view, that they may profit by all the events of life.

The first of these objects is their progressive and entire sanctification to God. We "reverenced" our earthly parents, says the apostle, when they corrected us; and "shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live?" inasmuch as He chastens us only "for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness." (Heb. xii. 9, 10.)—The second object is their increased fruitfulness in every good work. "I am the true Vine, and My Father is the Husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." (John xv. 1, 2.)—The third object is their usefulness in the church and in the world. One of the purposes of their continuance upon the earth is, that, by their

example and benevolent labours, they may edify one another, and promote the welfare of mankind generally. By their purity and uprightness, by their meekness under injuries, by their patience in suffering, by their generous love to mankind, and by their readiness for every good work, they are to exhibit the nature and benefits of Christ's religion, and thus recommend it to the practical acceptance of all. Their calling is, to be "the light of the world," and "the salt of the earth;" and they are rendered such by the combined operation of the providence and grace of God. Their enjoyments are intended to increase their thankfulness to the Giver of all good, and their sufferings to render their subjection to Him complete. When they are "merry," therefore, they are to "sing psalms" of praise to God, who fills their hearts with gladness; and when they are "afflicted," they are to "pray" for patience, and for spiritual improvement under the chastening hand of their heavenly Father. (James v. 13.) For,

"Happy the man who sees a God employ'd  
In all the good and ill that chequer life!  
Resolving all events, with their effects  
And manifold results, into the will  
And arbitration wise of the Supreme."\*

The men of the world are apt to forget that the affairs of mankind are all directed and controlled by an almighty, wise, and merciful Providence. Religious people acknowledge the fact, but often observe that the dispensations of Providence are dark and mysterious. They observe that ministers of even more than ordinary gifts and piety sometimes die in early life, and the

\* Cowper.

hopes of the church are cut off; fathers and mothers die when their children most need their example and care; and other events equally painful try the faith of good and thoughtful men. A zealous philanthropist is suddenly interrupted in his career of usefulness, and mourners, painfully sensible of their loss, follow him to his long home; while an infidel blasphemer lives to dis-honour God, and to cast abroad “firebrands, arrows, and death.” Cases of this kind are simply mysterious, because we do not see the end which God intends to accomplish by them. When that is seen, our perplexity will give place to admiration.

The parents of “the man that was born blind” often wondered, doubtless, why their son was denied the gift of sight, so as to grow up to manhood helpless and dependent, and of little use in the world; but his blindness became a matter of thankfulness, when they saw that it led both him and them to an acquaintance with Christ, and to the performance of a miracle, by which the Messiahship of Jesus was confirmed, and other persons were induced to believe in Him to the saving of their souls. (John ix. 3.) Our Saviour was often requested to visit persons in distress, in order to their relief; and He was usually prompt in His compliance with the calls that were made upon Him. He went instantly to the house of Jairus, whose daughter lay a dying, when the distressed father applied to Him; and He was equally ready to go to the house of the centurion, whose servant was in a state of severe affliction. (Mark v. 22-24; Luke vii. 4-6.) Yet, when He was requested to visit Lazarus of Bethany in his mortal sickness, Jesus “abode two days still in the same place

where He was," as if regardless of the message sent by the sisters of the dying man; and He did not come to Bethany till four days after the funeral. During this interval how mysterious does our Lord's conduct appear! especially when it is remembered that Lazarus was a "friend," of whose hospitality and that of his sisters Jesus and His disciples had often partaken; and "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." He is attentive to strangers in distress, and appears to neglect His friends. The mystery was unravelled, when Jesus, in the presence of a vast concourse of people, called Lazarus out of his grave, and "many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things that Jesus did, believed on Him." (John xi. 45.) Even the sisters of Lazarus, when they witnessed the result, must have shed tears of thankfulness and joy for their brother's illness and death, and for Jesus's delay, which for a time occasioned them great perplexity and distress. Their brother was a living demonstration that Jesus is the Christ of God; but this he became by means of his sickness and death.

So it will be in the end of the world, with respect to all the perplexities and sufferings of God's children. In that day the design of every providential dispensation will be disclosed to the wonder of angels and men, and so as to call forth everlasting adoration and praise. In the meanwhile, the best and wisest of men "see through a glass, darkly," and must therefore submit to "walk by faith, not by sight." Of this, however, they are assured, that their "light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." (2 Cor. iv. 17.) It is hence

their duty, in every season of suffering, to preserve a temper of mind which is equally remote from stoical apathy on the one hand, and from fretfulness and impatience on the other. They are neither to "despise the chastening of the Lord," nor to "faint when they are rebuked of Him;" but to regard His corrections with becoming seriousness, anxious to profit by them all, and to maintain a calm resignation to His gracious will. (Heb. xii. 5.) By the cultivation of such a temper, they will derive spiritual profit from every painful event, and by their example will exhibit the power and excellence of true religion, to the glory of God, and the benefit of all around them.

The truth is,

"Not deeply to discern, not much to know,  
Mankind were made to wonder and adore."

Mysteries everywhere abound. God's act of creation is a mystery; His works, in every department, the dispensations of His providence, and the scheme of redemption, are all full of mysteries, which the human intellect labours in vain to fathom. Why some nations enjoy the full light of the Gospel, and others remain for ages in the unbroken darkness of heathenism;—why some persons are unavoidably born to poverty, sickness, pain, obscurity, and an early death; and others are born to riches, health, honour, and a long life;—why some are successful in all their undertakings, so that with them property rapidly accumulates; and others prosper in nothing, but are thwarted and baffled in every project they form, and in every effort they put forth;—why some persons enjoy all the delights and advantages of education, so as to realize all the pleasures and benefits

of literature and science ; while others, without any fault of their own, are doomed to a life of ignorance and barbarity of manners, knowing scarcely any gratification but that which arises from the indulgence of their animal propensities ;—are questions which we cannot answer, and never shall be able to answer, till we rise into a higher state of being. Things that were incomprehensible to us in our childhood, we thoroughly understood when we had attained to a ripeness of years ; and what we know not *now*, we shall know *hereafter*.

Instead, then, of attempting to pry into that which is inscrutable, every wise man will say, “ ‘ All the days of my appointed ’ intellectual minority ‘ will I wait,’ till I attain the full perfection of my nature at the resurrection of the just, when the works, the plans, and the purposes of God will be seen in the pure light of heaven. In the meanwhile, I will, in the strength of Divine grace, believe His word ; live a life of faith in His Son, ‘ who loved me, and gave Himself for me ; ’ walk in ‘ all His ordinances and commandments ; ’ and meekly submit to His fatherly correction, whenever He lays His hand upon me,—thankful if by any means I may be a partaker of His holiness, and obtain admission into His kingdom and glory.”

## N O T E S.

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### *Note A, page 2.*

“FEW, if any, of the ancient pagan philosophers acknowledged God to be, in the most proper sense, the Creator of the world. By calling Him *Δημιουργός*, ‘the Maker of the world,’ they did not mean that He brought it out of non-existence into being; but only that He built it out of pre-existent materials, and disposed it into a regular form and order. Even those philosophers who held God an incorporeal essence, yet supposed two first principles of things, really distinct from one another, both existing from eternity; an incorporeal mind and passive matter.” “The famous Galen, after having acknowledged that the opinion of Moses, who ascribed the production of all things to God, is far more agreeable to reason than that of Epicurus, who attributed the whole frame of things to a fortuitous concus-sion of atoms, yet asserts the pre-existence of matter; and that the power of God could not extend itself beyond the capacity of matter which it wrought upon; and that this was that in which Plato, and those of the Greeks who writ rightly upon the nature of things, differed from Moses. I would observe, by the way, that here is plain proof that the learned heathens were sensible that Moses held that God not only formed the world out of matter, but created the matter itself out of which the world was made, which the Greek philosophers denied.” “The learned Dr. Thomas Burnet, who was well acquainted with the opinions of the ancients, says that the Ionic, Pythagoric, Platonic, and Stoic schools all agreed in asserting the eternity of matter; and that the doctrine that matter was created out of nothing

seems to have been unknown to the philosophers, and which they had no notion of."—Leland's "Necessity and Advantages of the Christian Revelation," vol. i., pp. 305–307. Edition of 1764.

According to Xenophon, Socrates refused to inquire into the origin and operations of the material universe, being discouraged by the discordant and contradictory opinions of those who professed to have prosecuted such inquiries with success. "Nor did he amuse himself to reason of the secrets of nature, nor to search into the manner of the creation of what the sophists call the world, nor to dive into the cause of the motions of the heavens. On the contrary, he exposed the folly of such as give themselves up to these contemplations ; and he asked if it was after having acquired a perfect knowledge of human things, that they undertook to search into the divine ? or if they thought themselves very wise in neglecting what concerned them, to employ themselves in things above them ? He was astonished, likewise, that they did not see that it was impossible for men to comprehend anything of all those wonders, seeing they who have the reputation of being most knowing in them are of quite different opinions, and can agree no better than so many fools and madmen. For as some of these are not afraid of the most dangerous and frightful accidents, while others are in dread of what is not to be feared : so, too, among those philosophers some are of opinion that there is no action but what may be done in public, nor word that may not freely be spoken before the whole world ; while others, on the contrary, believe that we ought to avoid the conversation of men, and keep in a perpetual solitude. Some have despised the temples and the altars, and have taught not to honour the gods ; while others have been so superstitious as to worship wood, stones, and irrational creatures. And as to the knowledge of natural things, some have confessed but one only being : others have admitted an infinite number.

Some have believed that all things are in a perpetual motion ; others, that nothing moves. Some have held the world to be full of continual generations and corruptions : others assure us that nothing is engendered or destroyed."—"The Memorable Things of Socrates, written by Xenophon. Translated into English by E. Bysshe," pp. 5, 6. Edition of 1712.

Pliny the Younger, another erudite heathen, came to the conclusion that whatever gods there may be, there is no providence, and therefore no superior power in which mankind are authorized to confide, and to whose authority they are bound to submit. He says, "That the sovereign power and deity, whatsoever it is, should have regard of mankind, is a toy and vanity worthy to be laughed at. For, can we choose but believe, can we make any doubt, but needs that divinity and godhead must be polluted with so base and manifold a ministry ? And hardly in manner may it be judged whether of the twain be better and more expedient for mankind to believe that the gods have regard of us, or to be persuaded that they have none at all ; considering that some men have no respect and reverence at all of the gods ; others again, so much as it is a very shame to see their superstition."—"The Natural History of C. Plinius Secundus, translated into English by Philemon Holland," vol. i., p. 4. Edition of 1601.

In this manner thoughtful men, destitute of the light of revelation, reasoned on Divine subjects, "and found no end in wandering mazes lost." Well might the learned translator of Pliny say, "Here let Christians take heed, and be thankful to God for the light revealed unto them out of the holy Scriptures."

*Note B, page 15.*

"MIRACLES are a supernatural proof of a Divine power and providence ; and no man who believes that there ever

was a true miracle wrought can be an atheist. And therefore it is no wonder that atheists are such professed enemies to the belief of miracles: but it is a great wonder that they can persuade themselves to reject all those authentic relations we have of miracles, both from the law of Moses, and from the Gospel of Christ, which are the most credible histories in the world,—if we look upon them as no more than histories,—and have obtained the most universal belief. Especially this is very unaccountable in those men who pretend to deism, to acknowledge a God who made the world. For cannot that God who made the world, and made nature, act without, or above, or against nature when He pleases? And may it not become the Divine wisdom and goodness to do this, when it is necessary, for the more abundant conviction of mankind, who are sunk in atheism or idolatry? when signs and wonders are necessary to awaken men into the sense and belief of God and His providence? which was the case in the days of Moses; or to give authority to prophets, to declare and reveal the will of God to men; (which was a reason for miracles as long as God thought fit to make any new and public revelations of His will;) when it is as reasonable and credible that God, who can, when He pleases, should sometimes work miracles, as it is that He should take care to preserve the knowledge of Himself and His will, and to restore it when it is lost; or to make such new discoveries of His grace, as the fallen state of mankind requires; when, I say, the thing itself is so credible and so worthy of God, what reasonable pretence can there be for rejecting miracles, for which we have the authority of the best attested history in the world?"—Sherlock's "Discourse concerning Divine Providence," pp. 349, 350. Edition of 1715.

*Note C, page 27.*

"THE principle upon which children are punished for the sins of their fathers lies at the foundation of God's moral government over man, where fathers and children are regarded as a special unity; children being represented in their parents, and parents again continued in their children. Though to finite minds inexplicable, such has been the method of the Divine procedure from the time of Adam, in whom all died. It is the principle, too, on which is to be explained the apparent contradiction between the Divine grant of the land to Abraham, and the fact that he never received personal possession of it. (Gen. xiii. 15, 17; Acts vii. 5.) And more particularly it is represented in Scripture as consistent with Divine justice to punish children for the sins of their parents, although they have not participated in them; as in the case of Canaan, the son of Ham; (Gen. ix. 25;) the death of the first-born of the Egyptians, and of the children of Achan, who perished with him. (Josh. vii. 24.) With this procedure accords the testimony of Jeremiah: 'Thou shonest lovingkindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them.' (Jer. xxxii. 18.) To this is subjoined: 'Thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men; to give everyone according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings:' intimating that God visits the iniquity of the fathers especially on the children who pursue similar courses. (Matt. xxiii. 29, &c.)"—Macdonald's "Introduction to the Pentateuch," vol. ii., p. 54. Edition of 1861.

*Note D, page 34.*

"THE noxious orders of plants, of which thorns and thistles are the representatives, are troublesome and injurious on many accounts, but especially from their numbers,

powers of multiplication, and tenacity of life. The order of composites to which the thistle belongs, is the largest and most generally diffused of all known tribes of plants. There are now as many species belonging to the order as there were known plants in the whole world in the time of Linnaeus, and almost all have the hairy calix. Thistles themselves are generally distributed. Their powers of multiplication, too, are exceedingly great, owing not merely to the facilities of transport and diffusion which their peculiar structure provides, but also to the multitude of seeds which they produce. The number of seeds yielded by a single plant of the common spear-thistle, for instance, has been estimated at about twenty-four thousand. Add to this the extraordinary vitality, under all circumstances of climate and seasons, possessed by these plants sown by nature's own hand, and it may be easily conceived, that unless kept in check by man and some other provisions by the beneficent Creator, they would speedily overrun the earth. All are familiar with the fact, that when weeds effect an entrance into the space appropriated to cultivated species, the latter are starved in their growth, and soon destroyed."— Macdonald "On Creation and the Fall," pp. 170, 171. Edition of 1856.

*Note E, page 104.*

"AMONG other rare inventions that of the mariner's compass is most worthy of admiration. By means of it was navigation perfected, and lives and goods of many thousands have been and daily are preserved. It finds out a way through the vast ocean, in the greatest storms and darkest nights, where is neither path to follow, nor inhabitants or passengers to inquire. It points out the way to the skilful mariner when all other helps fail him, and that more certainly, though it be without reason, sense, and life, than without the help thereof all the wizards and learned clerks

in the world, using the united strength of their wits and cunning, can possibly do. By means of it are the commodities of all countries discovered ; trade, traffic, and human society maintained ; their several forms of religion and government observed ; and the whole world made as it were one commonwealth, and the most distant nations fellow-citizens of the same body politic.

" Let others search out the causes of this so wonderful an instrument, and pretend therein I know not what sympathy ; I, for my part, as oft as I look upon it, cannot but exceedingly admire, and most willingly praise, the power and providence of God."—Hakewill's "Apology of the Power and Providence of God," p. 323. Edition of 1635.

*Note F, page 281.*

" **H**EERE remaineth a question, how it may stand with God's immutable will and decree, that our prayers should be of such strength and force to alter the threatenings which are decreed, and therefore of force must come to pass ? I answer, God never promised anything in Scripture, for the most part, (except it were the absolute promises concerning Messias, and such like,) but it hath a condition annexed unto it, either expressly, or to be understood. Likewise, He never threateneth (for the most part) but a condition is added thereunto. As for example. Adam was created of God, that he should have lived continually in blessed estate, if he would so remain : this was the condition and the decree. Destruction was preached to the Ninevites, if they repented not : this was the condition and the decree. Nineveh repented, and was not destroyed, but saved : was therefore God's decree altered ? No. For He decreed their destruction, but upon this condition, if they repented not. Pray, therefore, if thou be godly, that He would give thee the grace to continue : and if thou be sinful, pray that He give thee grace to repent. And thus

very well our prayers have strength to stay God's wrath; His decrees remaining immutable, because it is threatened but upon a condition, if we repent not."—"Private Prayers put forth by Authority during the Reign of Queen Elizabeth. Edited for the Parker Society," page 436. 1851.

*Note G, page 299.*

"WHEN God saith that He will harden Pharaoh's heart, the meaning is not, either, 1. That by any positive, much less by any forcible or compulsory action, in one kind or other, He would cause Pharaoh's heart to become obdurate or hard. This is granted on all hands. Or, 2. That He would withdraw His grace or Spirit from him to such a degree, that by means hereof it should become impossible for him not to be hardened. If this be affirmed, it clearly followeth that until this act of God, whereby Pharaoh's heart was hardened, he was, by means of the grace and Spirit of God in him, in a sufficient capacity to have repented; otherwise there could be no occasion for God to withdraw His Spirit from him, in order to his obduration or impenitency; nor can such a withdrawing as this be proved from the Scriptures. Or, 3. That He meant to withhold the Spirit of grace from him in any such degree, that He would leave him under an absolute impossibility of repentance. For, besides that such a withholding as this cannot be proved from the Scriptures, nor by any good reason, that persons, even after a long course of disobedience and rebellion against God, are yet in a capacity, or possibility at least, of repenting and submitting unto God, is fully evident from Ezek. xii. 2, 3, compared, and 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15,16; to omit many other places of like import. So that when God said He would harden Pharaoh's heart, His meaning was not that He would interpose, either by any such action or non-action, whereby Pharaoh's heart must of necessity be hardened; but either, 1. That He would proceed or deal

after such a manner with him, as, namely, by sparing his person for a long time, by a gracious removing, and taking off, time after time, those several judgments or plagues which he brought upon his land, so giving him respite and ease between plague and plague, and by such gradual withdrawals of His Spirit from him, as by the rule of His proceedings in like cases his sin required, that it was none otherwise like but that Pharaoh, being a man of proud, haughty, and profane spirit, would be hardened thereby, and persist in the habitual stubbornness of his heart against God ; or else, 2. That He would take the course specified with him, upon which He certainly knew or foresaw that he would be hardened. Such acts are frequently in Scripture ascribed sometimes unto God, and sometimes unto men ; some occasion whereof only they administer, though they act nothing positively or directly in order to the production of them, no, nor yet intend their production. Thus God is said to have turned the heart of the Egyptians ‘to hate His people, to deal subtilly with His servants,’ (Psalm cv. 25,) only by those providential acts of His grace towards them immediately preceding : ‘And He increased His people greatly ; and made them stronger than their enemies.’ (Compare herewith Exod. i. 7-10.) It cannot reasonably be imagined, much less substantially proved, that God did multiply and increase His people with an intent hereby to expose them to the hatred of their enemies, or to exasperate the spirits of the Egyptians against them ; only, by multiplying them so greatly, He ministered such an occasion unto them, which so wrought upon their evil and corrupt hearts, that it provoked their passion of hatred against them. And when God intended and was about thus to multiply them, He might have said, and this in sufficient propriety of speech, ‘I will exasperate and provoke the Egyptians against My people,’ as here He saith, ‘I will harden Pharaoh’s

heart.'”—Goodwin's “Exposition of the Ninth Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans,” pp. 176, 177. Edition of 1835.

*Note H, page 303.*

“If David's words concerning God's bidding Shimei be understood to be spoken by the common Hebraism, by which such verbs as are active in sound are only permissive in signification, all those horrible absurdities will be avoided; or if the Hebrew particle which we render *because*, were rendered *if*, as sometimes it signifies, it will then be no more than a mere conjecture arising out of David's guilty conscience: as if he should have said, ‘If the Lord hath said,—as for aught I know He hath, and I am sure He justly may,—*Curse David*; who shall then say, Wherefore hast Thou done so?’ For God might justly curse David, in revenge of his sins, by whatsoever messenger He pleased to send; as well by Shimei as by Samuel; who, if God had said to him, ‘Curse David,’ had but discharged his message, (as Samuel himself had done before him,) and not committed a sin in doing what God distinctly bid him. How much better were it to think that David erred in his conjecture, (as easily he might, who found it no hard thing to commit adultery and murder,) than to speak irreverently or disrespectfully of God Almighty! It was an argument of David's modesty, and of the severe reflection which he made upon his sins, to look upon it as a wise and righteous act of God's economy, that God should thus punish him for his sins, by permitting Shimei to reproach him openly; or that by restraining the wickedness of Shimei's heart from all other acts at this time, he should limit him to this, (when perhaps of itself it was indifferent,) thus to punish David's sins. But in this and the like cases, God forbid we should say with —— ——, that ‘the sin is done by God's impulse, or by God's stirring up to unjust acts, as acts:’ although in

sundry respects the effect doth seem to be ascribed unto God, after the Hebrew custom of speech, and the phrases, *exciting*, or *bidding*, &c., are used figuratively or tropically of God Himself, when as yet He is so far from exciting or commanding, that He doth the contrary to them both."—Pierce's "Divine Philanthropy Defended," chap. iv., sec. 85. Edition of 1658.

*Note I, page 310.*

"WHEN God is said in Scripture to command Shimei to curse David, to profane His sanctuary, to give the wives of David unto Absalom, to pollute men in their gifts, and the like, such words must be expounded by an Hebraism, whereby many verbs which are active in sound are only permissive in signification. And herein I agree as well with Melancthon as with Grotius, and all other the most learned interpreters of Scripture, and with the judgment of common sense. So as my apprehension of such texts is plainly this : that God did permit, or that He did patiently suffer, or that He did not hinder, those wicked acts ; namely, the cursing of David, the profanation of His temple, the pollution of His people, and Absalom's violation of his father's wives. Nor do I say that thus it *may be*, but thus it *must*. For nothing can actively pollute, but what is unclean in itself ; as nothing properly can moisten but what is wet. Now God, we know, is the Spirit of holiness and purity, who hateth sin with a real, not with a counterfeit, hatred, as Melancthon speaks ; and cannot decree what He hateth, because He cannot be willing of that of which He is unwilling. It would imply a contradiction."—Pierce's "Divine Philanthropy Defended," pp. 23, 24. Edition of 1658.

"For God to suffer or endure the sins of men is exactly agreeable to the analogy of faith ; but to will and work sin, or to have a hand in the effecting of it, is according to the analogy of what is worse than infidelity. The scrip-

ture in the left column must be interpreted by that in the right.

“ 1. ‘If the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet.’ (Ezek. xiv. 9.)—That is, ‘I have permitted him to be deceived:’ or, as Grotius, ‘I will deceive him by giving him such an end as he expects not.’

“ 2. ‘Behold, I will profane My sanctuary.’ (Ezek. xxiv. 21.)—That is, ‘I will expose it to the lusts of the Gentiles, and not restrain them from profaning it.’

“ 3. ‘I polluted them in their own gifts.’ (Ezek. xx. 26.)—That is, ‘I suffered them to commit sacrileges, or to make sacrilegious sacrifices.’

“ 4. ‘I gave them statutes that were not good.’ (Ezek. xx. 25.)—That is, ‘I withdrew My grace from them, so that, contemning My laws, they made laws unto themselves.’

“ 5. ‘God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had

“ 1. ‘Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate,’ saith the Lord.’ (Zech. viii. 16, 17.)

“ 2. ‘He shall not profane the sanctuary of his God. He shall not come nigh unto the altar, that he profane not My sanctuaries; for I the Lord do sanctify them.’ (Lev. xxi. 12, 23.)

“ 3. ‘Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.’ (Hab. i. 13.)

“ 4. ‘The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.’ (Psalm xix. 8.) ‘The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.’ (Rom. vii. 12.)

“ 5. ‘Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness; neither shall evil dwell with Thee.’ (Psalm v. 4.) ‘Thou desirest truth in the inward

pleasure in unrighteousness.' (2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.)—That is, 'I will suffer magicians to deceive them ;' or, 'I will not hinder delusion from being sent.'

" 6. 'O Lord, why hast Thou made us to err from Thy ways, and hardened our heart from Thy fear ?' (Isai. lxiii. 17.)—That is, 'Why wouldest Thou suffer us, by our being oppressed with a long tyranny, to faint in our duties, and to forsake Thy law ?'

parts.' (Psalm li. 6.) 'The fruit of the Spirit is in all truth.' (Eph. v. 9.) 'As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked ; but that the wicked turn from his way and live : turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways : why will ye die ?' (Ezek. xxxiii. 11.)

" 6. 'Ye have wearied the Lord with your words.' (Mal. ii. 17.) 'Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely ; and come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?' (Jer. vii. 9, 10.)

" Whether it implies not a most blasphemous contradiction for God to will what He hateth, and to decree what He forbiddeth, and to set forward what He hindereth, (as far as promises and threats and persuasions come to,) and to have a willingness of the same thing of which He is perfectly unwilling, every ABCdarian may well inform us." —Pierce's "Self-Condemnation exemplified," pp. 55, 56. Edition of 1658.

The texts of holy Scripture which appear to connect the hand of God with the sins of men, as cause and effect, only prove,—

" 1. That God foresees the evil which is in the heart of the wicked, and their future steps in peculiar circumstances,

with ten thousand times more clearness and certainty, than a good huntsman foresees all the windings, doublings, and shifts, of a hunted fox ; and that He overrules their wicked counsels to the execution of His own wise and holy designs, as a good rider overrules the mad prancings of a vicious horse to the display of his perfect skill in horsemanship, and to the treading down of the enemy in the day of battle. 2. That God ‘catches the wise in their own craftiness ;’ and that, to punish the wicked, He permits their wicked counsels to be defeated, and their best-concerted schemes to prove abortive. 3. That He frequently tries the faith, and exercises the patience of good men, by letting loose the wicked upon them, as in the case of Job and of Christ. 4. That He often punishes the wickedness of one man by letting loose upon him the wickedness of another man ; and that He frequently avenges Himself of one wicked nation by letting loose upon it the wickedness of another nation. Thus He let Absalom and Shimei loose upon David. Thus, a parable spoken by the prophet Micaiah informs us, that God, after having let a lying spirit loose upon Zedekiah, the false prophet, let Zedekiah loose upon wicked Ahab. That the Lord let loose the Philistines upon disobedient Israel, and the Romans upon the obdurate Jews and their accursed city ; using those wicked heathen as His vindictive scourge, just as He used swarms of frogs and locusts when He punished rebellious Egypt with His plagues. 5. That He sometimes lets a wicked man loose upon himself, as in the case of Ahithophel, Nabal, and Judas, who became their own executioners. 6. That when wicked men are going to commit atrocious wickedness, He sometimes inclines their hearts so to relent, that they commit a less crime than they intended ; for instance, when Joseph’s brethren were going to starve him to death, by providential circumstances God inclined their hearts to spare his life ; thus, instead of destroying him, they only sold him into Egypt. 7. With

respect to Rev. xvii. 17, the context and the full stream of the Scripture require that it should be understood thus: ‘As God, by providential circumstances, which seemed to favour their worldly views, suffered wicked kings to agree and give their kingdoms unto the beast, to help the beast to execute God’s judgments upon corrupted churches and wicked states, so He will peculiarly let those kings loose upon the whore, and they shall agree to hate her, and shall make her desolate and naked.’

“Upon the whole, it is contrary to all the rules of criticism, decency, and piety, to take advantage of the dark construction of a sentence, or to avail oneself of a parable, an hyperbole, a bold metaphor, or an unguarded saying of a good man interwoven with the thread of Scripture history, in order to make appear that ‘God worketh all things in all men, even wickedness in the wicked.’ Such a method of wresting the oracles of God, to make them speak the language of Belial and Moloch, is as ungenerous as our inferring from these words, ‘I do not condemn thee,’ that Christ does not condemn adulterers; that Christianity encourages adultery; and that this single sentence, taken in a filthy, antinomian sense, outweighs all the Sermon upon the Mount, as well as the holy meaning of the context; for these words being spoken to an adulteress whom the magistrates had not condemned to die, and whom the Pharisees wanted Christ to condemn to be stoned, according to the law of Moses, it is evident that our Lord’s words, when taken in connexion with the context, carry this edifying meaning: ‘I am come to act the part of a Saviour, and not that of a magistrate; if the magistrates have not condemned thee to be stoned, neither do I condemn thee to that dreadful kind of death; avail thyself of thy undeserved reprieve; go, and repent, and evidence the sincerity of thy repentance by sinning no more.’ Hence I conclude, that all the texts quoted by the fatalists prove that God necessi-

tates men to sin by His decrees, just as John viii. 11 proves that Christ countenances the filthy sin of adultery." —Fletcher's Works, vol. v., pp. 287—289. Edition of 1859.

"If you ask, how far God's providence is concerned about sin; we reply, that it is concerned about it four ways. First, in morally hindering the internal commission of it before it is committed. Secondly, in providentially hindering (at times) the external commission of it, when it has been intentionally committed. Thirdly, in marking, bounding, and overruling it, while it is committed. And, fourthly, in bringing about means of properly pardoning or exemplarily punishing it, after it has been committed."—*Ibid.*, p. 318.

THE END.

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